DIGITAL FilmMaker
ISSUE 8 £4.99
YOUR NEW GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING

WHY FILMMAKERS LOVE TO SHOOT HORROR

From the Wicker Man to Evil Dead and beyond...

Film props and special effects

How to add extra impact to any filmmaking project

Camera movement techniques Part 2

Practical advice and essential kit for for filming on the go

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Q&A

An inside look at internet series Kill Em All with its writer Jesse Pringle and director Shawn Wright

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Welcome to DIGITAL FilmMaker

ISSUE 8, OCTOBER 2013

Horror. Of all the different genres that this magazine covers, we're always amazed at just how many filmmakers opt to shoot horror. From shorts through to feature-length offerings, we seem to be constantly receiving news of another project that's underway. Indeed, our recent social media shout-out requesting readers to send in their own behind-the-scenes production images opened the floodgates. So, that's why this issue we've decided to delve a little deeper into the enduring appeal of horror for filmmakers. Take a look at part one starting on page 10 as it's a good read. So good, in fact, that we've had to, excuse the pun, chop it up and run part two in issue 9.

On a related note, we also delve into the world of props and special effects, with an obvious nod towards horror once again, with a feature on Bloody Stuff. We get the lowdown on everything from squibs and smoke effects through to stunt props and CGI. If you need to make your next film gain impact, then this special effects feast will offer up some great advice. Elsewhere, there's another crop of filmmaking features, tutorials and reviews to get stuck into. Meanwhile, Jonathan Sothcott continues to tackle your production quandaries via his hugely popular Ask the Producer column, which provides invaluable and highly practical advice on getting it right first time.



Editor



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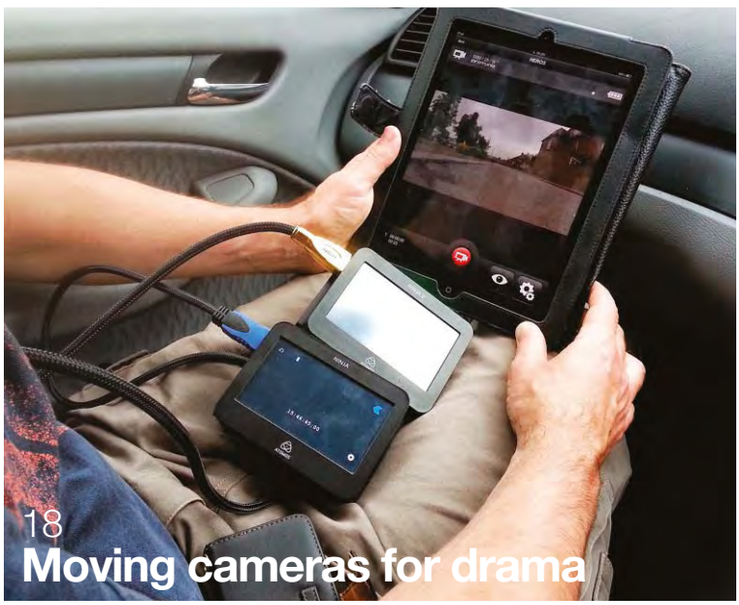
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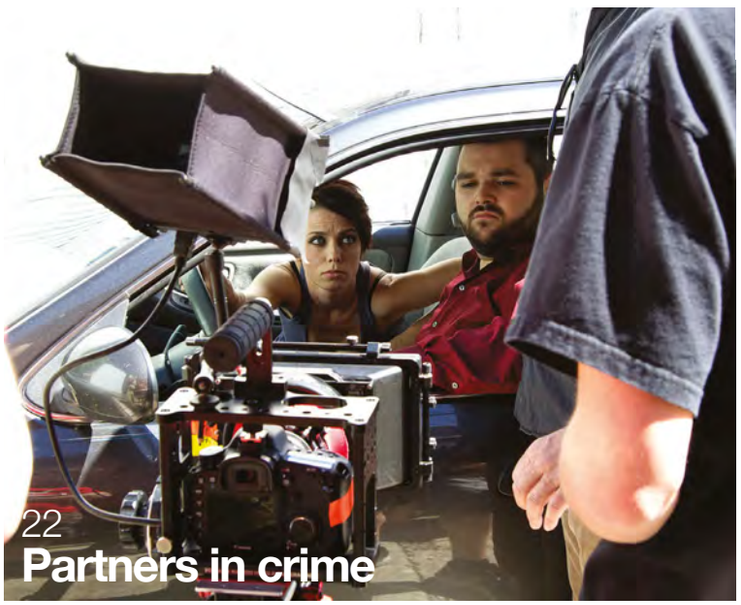
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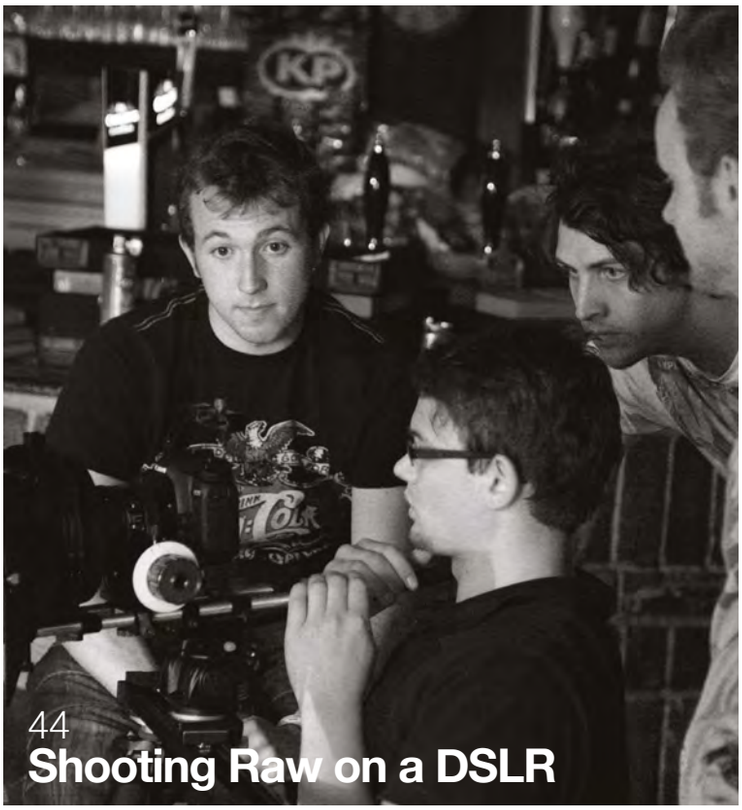
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The lowdown on latest developments from the world of digital video

GET CONNECTED WITH THE NEX-5T



Sony has released its latest pocket-sized powerhouse: the NEX-5T. Packing a 16.1-megapixel Exmor APS HD CMOS sensor into its tiny body, the new model promises to deliver crisp, clean stills and detailed Full HD movie footage, with Fast Hybrid AF technology offering fast, precise tracking autofocus. The small form-factor makes it an ideal companion for globetrotters and daytrippers alike, with additional creative control and flexibility offered by the ability to switch between any of the Sony E-mount lenses.

In addition to some top-notch image capture technology, the NEX-5T also boasts a plethora of connectivity features, with built-in Wi-Fi allowing users to connect directly to their PC, TV or smartphone for instant wireless transfers of still and videos. It's also the first interchangeable lens E-mount camera from Sony to offer NFC, providing one-touch wireless connection to Android smartphones and tablets - no set-up required. Integral Smart Remote Control also lets you operate your camera from your smartphone: perfect for self and group portraits or when photographing sensitive subjects from a distance. The tiltable LCD flips through 180-degrees, with Auto Portrait Framing providing additional assistance when you want to take the perfect selfie without the guesswork.

There's a growing range of downloadable PlayMemories Camera Apps that NEX-5T owners can take advantage of too, with a choice of free and paid-for picture effects and handy utilities ready to add to your camera, including a brand new Lens Compensation app and recently updated Direct Upload Version 2.0 for streamlined transfers over Wi-Fi. Find out more about the NEX-5T (Sony online price £599 with standard zoom lens) at **www.sony.co.uk**

NEW SONY OFFERS SEAMLESS SHOOTING

Sony has also announced the latest addition to its mirrorless range of digital cameras; the new A3000. Sporting a large 20.1-megapixel APS-C Exmor sensor, integrated SteadyShot technology and Full HD AVCHD video recording capabilities, the A3000 places emphasis on user-friendliness in combination with powerful features. Providing users with a wide array of creative controls, the A3000 also features a bright EVF - Sony's acclaimed Tru-Finder - and a newly-designed grip that provides added comfort and security. For those upgrading from fixed-lens cameras, the A3000 opens up a whole new world of creative opportunities with its E-mount. This allows users to choose from the rapidly-growing range of interchangeable E-mount and Carl Zeiss lenses also available from Sony. The cameras Full HD movie mode offers scope to capture crisp, detailed footage with 50i or 25p shooting modes, widening your creative choices further.

The A3000's large sensor also promises a better low light performance with its superior light-gathering and noise suppression capabilities. The EVF provides a useful alternative to shooting with the rear LCD and delivers 100% field-of-view. Information displayed in the Tru-Finder window also makes it easy to keep track of your current settings, while an added touch like the optional grid overlay helps to perfect your composition.

The Multi-Interface Show lets users add to their kit with a range of external flashguns or video accessories, such as the ECM-XYST1M Stereo Microphone and the battery-powered HVL-LEIR1 Video IR light. Creative enthusiasts benefit from Sony's proprietary Picture Effects that can be applied to in-camera captures for a distinctive look, while Auto Object Framing lends a hand to those who need help perfecting their framing. The new camera is available in Europe from September, (Sony online price £369). Full specs via **www.sony.co.uk**



MIRRORLESS **LUMIX DMC-GH3**

Panasonic's Mirrorless Lumix DMC-GH3 camera and Lumix G VARIO 14-140mm F3.5-5.6 ASPH. POWER O.I.S. lens have both been credited with prestigious EISA Awards. Praised for its versatility, the GH3 won the 'European Photo-Video Camera 2013-2014' category, with the EISA Awards panel stating: "The Panasonic LUMIX DMC-GH3 offers the best video quality of any combined still and movie camera in this price segment - and actually in some higher segments as well. It offers full manual as well as completely automatic video recording, making it ideal for in-the-field shooting as well as more formal situations. It's also a pretty handy stills camera with a full range of controls, making it an impressively flexible package. The Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3 is very popular with videographers partly because it is a very lightweight and rugged, weather-resistant camera that's serviced by a great selection of high-quality lenses." You can find out more about it and the lens over at **www.panasonic.co.uk**



Award for Canon



Canon has also picked up EISA Awards in entry-level, enthusiast and professional imaging categories. The EOS 100D won 'European SLR Camera 2013-2014', the EF 200-400mm f/4L IS USM Extender 1.4x lens has been named 'European Professional Lens 2013-2014' and the Canon EOS 6D has won the 'European Advanced SLR Camera 2013-2014'. "Offering first-class products that enable creative expression is what drives Canon, so we're honoured to receive these awards," said Steve Marshall, Product Marketing Director, Consumer Imaging Group, Canon Europe. "By offering truly innovative products and technologies, our vision is to help photographers at all levels take the next step in their imaging journey. These products are a great example of that vision, and this recognition from the EISA judging panel is a testament to their outstanding quality."



Reflecta unveils new multi-use screen range



Kenro, the UK distributor for respected German manufacturer Reflecta, has announced the launch of a new range of multi-purpose screens to suit a variety of applications and environments. Ideal for large-scale display of both stills and movies, the Crystaline Rollo range of pull-down screens offers four differently-sized models: 1.6 x 1.6m, 1.8 x 1.8m, 2 x 2m and 2.4 x 2.4m. Each screen is constructed from top-quality fabric that promises to deliver brilliant image quality, with a low 1.0 gain factor ensuring even light diffusion across its entire surface, so every member of the audience receives the best possible viewing experience, regardless of the location of their seat. The screen's 120-degree viewing angle is designed to further enhance its performance, making it suitable for large scale usage and screenings for larger audiences. With the facility to mount the product either to the wall or ceiling, the screen's proprietary Rollo Mechanism permits easy extension and retraction by the user. "Reflecta always designs their products with the end-user firmly in mind and this new range of projection screens are no exception," says Kenro Managing Director, Paul Kench. "They are the perfect solution for corporate presentations, educational talks, photographic displays or even home cinema." The Reflecta CrystalLine Rollo Screen range is available now along with a SRP of approximately £58.20 to £114 (incl VAT), depending on screen size.

For additional information, or to find a stockist, go to **www.kenro.co.uk** or call them on 01793 615836.

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NEW **HEDLER** SPOTLIGHT

UK distributor Flaghead Photographic Ltd. (www.flaghead.co.uk) has announced Hedler's new DF-25 HMI Fresnel Spotlight; a more powerful version of the manufacturer's popular DF15. The compact, lightweight DF-25 boasts a powerful new 250-watt metal halogen lamp that's equivalent to 900-watt tungsten, a focusing range of 15-degrees (Spot) or 50-degrees (Flood), flicker-free 5600K colour temperature and a 6,000 hour operating lamp life. The aluminium spotlight comes with unique built-in electronic ballast and doesn't require a fan for cooling, making it an ideal choice for video recording as it won't impact on your soundtrack. The DF-25 launches with an RRP of £958.80.



NEW TRIGGERBEAM PRO AVAILABLE NOW

The new TriggerBeam Pro kit is a long infra-red beam device designed for use in a variety of photographic and videographic projects. Ideal for photographers and videographers who want to easily capture images using Infra-Red Beam Breaking, the device boasts an IR beam with a range of around 20m in daylight and up to 30m in darkness. The TriggerBeam Pro can be connected directly to your camera's remote socket or using the MCT-1 control unit, which affords the facility to fine-tune the sensitivity of the sensors and to delay the triggering of the capture device for instance. It's also possible to choose between single and continuous shot capture over a user-defined time-span. A useful tool for capturing trickier subjects - for instance wildlife, fast-paced sports, event photography - the TriggerBeam Pro also has its applications in surveillance and security-related scenarios too. Each TriggerBeam Pro kit comprises an IR receiver, IR transmitter, two Stakepods, two weatherproof covers, a 2-degree IR baffle and a 3m cable (3.5mm to 2.5mm) plus a jack adapter. The kit is available now from Flaghead Photographic (**www.flaghead.co.uk**) with an RRP of £118.80 (inc. VAT).



Ricoh announces high-magnification compact and K-mount lenses

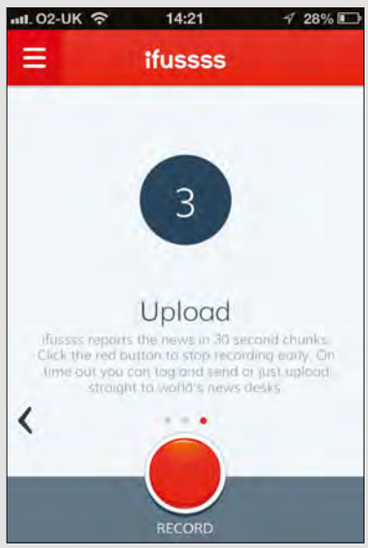
Ricoh Imaging UK has released details of its next innovation to hit the domestic digital compact camera market: the 'high-magnification' Ricoh HZ15. This brand new camera boasts a 24mm wide-angle, 15x optical zoom lens, providing scope to capture a wide variety of everyday subjects. The HZ15 boasts a 16-megapixel sensor, 230,000-dot 3-inch LCD and sophisticated SR (Shake Reduction) system, coupling these headline features with its sleek, high-grade design. The built-in lens covers a focal range spanning 24mm-36mm (35mm equivalent) and boasts a close-focusing distance of 3cm. The integral CCD-shift SR system promises shake-free stills and video footage when shooting at the telephoto end of the lens's focal range or in low-light. The camera's styling places emphasis on comfort, quality and easy operability, incorporating a glossy black outer coating on the body and a comfortable grip. Among the intuitively laid-out controls, the HZ15 provides direct access to its HD (1280 x 720, 16:9, 30fps) with a dedicated movie recording button. Users also benefit from a Movie SR mode to help minimise camera shake while filming. Due to become available from the end of September 2013, pricing is TBA.



Ricoh has also announced five HD Pentax-DA Limited interchangeable lenses for its K-mount DSLRs, each of which features high-grade HD coating and a rounded diaphragm. The five new optics comprise the following models: HD Pentax-DA 15mm F4ED AL Limited (589.99), HD Pentax-DA 21mm F3.2AL Limited (£589.99), HD Pentax-DA 35mm F2.8 Macro Limited (£639.99), HD Pentax-DA 40mm F2.8 Limited (£439.99) and HD Pentax-DA 70mm F2.4 Limited (£639.99), with each boasting the distinctive premium build-quality and styling of the acclaimed Limited Lens series. A hand-machined aluminium body is common to all of the models, in addition to an HD multi-layer coating that promises to deliver higher light transmittance and lower reflection levels than conventional multi-layer coatings, resulting in sharp, crystal clear images free from flare and ghosting. An additional SP (Super Protect) coating has been applied to the HD Pentax-DA 40mm F2.8 Limited lens to keep the front surface free of dust and dirt. The new lenses will be available from the end of September 2013. Get full details at **www.ricoh.co.uk**

MAKE CASH FROM YOUR SMARTPHONE VIDEOS

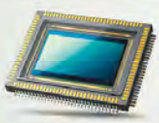
ifussss (If You See Something, Share Something) is an innovative new app that allows members of the public to make some cash from their video footage of breaking news stories. The app sends videos from smartphones directly to newsrooms all over the world, with content filtered and available in moments, seeking to solve the current "disconnect between newsrooms wanting breaking video news footage as soon as it happens and the public not knowing how to quickly get what they're recording to the people who want it the most". Newsrooms can search the newsroom platform at www.ifussss.com and pay a small fee to download any of the available clips. ifussss is free to download on IOS and Android platforms and provides users with the facility to record 30-second clips that are automatically geo, time and hash-tagged. Ed Brookes, co-founder of ifussss, states: "Mobile has changed news because it's so ubiquitous. The tree falling down in the forest is now on someone's camera roll. Video has value. ifussss is simply a reaction to that. We add more value to users video content by solving workflow issues for newsrooms and we believe in rewarding opportunity, here's the tools, help tell a story and you'll be paid. Simple."





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Fede Alvarez's Evil Dead (2013)

WHY FILMMAKERS LOVE TO SHOOT HORROR

Jon Towlson, author of the forthcoming book, Subversive Horror Cinema, reflects on the reasons for horror's enduring appeal to independent filmmakers and their audiences. Part 2 next issue…

Chills 'n' thrills

Audiences love to be scared, but they also love the thrills that horror brings them. This can be the thrill of the graphic shock, the thrill of the rollercoaster ride, or the thrill of taboos being broken. Filmmakers working in horror have the advantage of knowing their audience: the vast majority of horror fans are adolescent males and teenagers - the younger generation - and it has been this way since the 1950s, when low budget 'exploitation' first came to the fore.

The 1950s was the decade of the teenager; the first time youth became independent and affluent. Teenagers worked jobs and had income from their parents. They bought music and they drove cars. This mobility and 'plugging into' youth culture led to the rise of the American drive-in, where horror became a staple. Producers and distributors like American International Pictures capitalised on the craze for youth-oriented movies. Producer Herman Cohen made a series of horror pictures aimed squarely at teenagers, playing on teenage angst and fears. The most famous is I Was a Teenage Werewolf (1957), the first horror movie to use 'teenage' in the title. That movie, and the ones that followed, spoke to youth's experience of conformist 1950s America, born of rabid anti-communism, and the very-real, ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. In Cohen's films authority is not to be trusted - it creates monsters! And teenagers were the victims.

Dissolve to ten years later. Another generation is rising, this one born of the counter-culture in the time of Vietnam, flower power, race rioting. The desire for horror





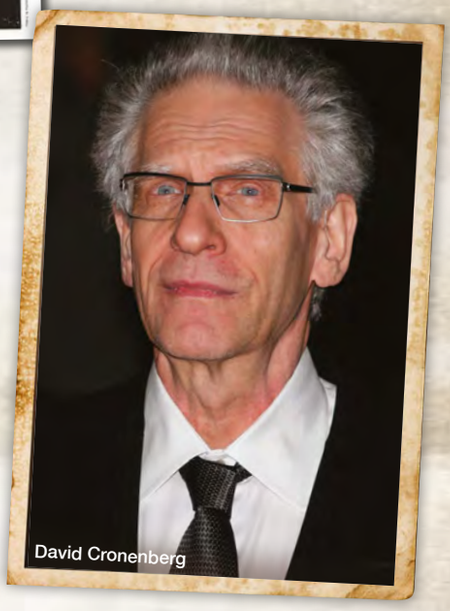
that breaks with traditional values results in the development of the 'Modern Horror Film', one that eschews supernatural beings in favour of human monsters, reflecting the violent times. Night of the Living Dead (1968) becomes a huge hit, first at the drive-in and then at 'midnight movie' showings where the youth audience goes to get 'stoned' and experience the thrill of seeing that great American Institution - the nuclear family - literally torn asunder by a revolutionary force metaphorically cast as rampaging zombies.

Throughout the 1970s the modern horror film thrives: cannibalism, demonic possession, psycho-killers: youth audiences, disillusioned by the system after Watergate, want nihilistic thrills, they get off on the anger of films like Last House on the Left (1972) and the perverse sexuality of early David Cronenberg (Shivers, 1974, Rabid, 1976), films which reflect the failure of the sexual revolution and the collapse of New Left student politics of the late 1960s.

Then in the early 1980s, the rise of home video: independent distributors peddling cheap product and a teenage audience looking for cheap thrills - in the comfort of their own living room. The slasher movie. The splatter movie. 'Splatstick' comedy horror. For a brief while, pre-certification days, youth audiences thrill at graphic special make up effects courtesy of Tom Savini, Rick Baker, Rob Bottin et al. Home video leads to DVD and audiences now become collectors and connoisseurs. Fan magazines proliferate as audiences become more aware of the filmmakers (and in many cases become filmmakers). Horror becomes specialised, easily targeted by distributors. Nowadays, on VOD and satellite, horror channels gain huge and loyal audiences. The delivery systems change but the desire for horror remains, and the reasons for its appeal go unchanged: chills 'n' thrills.

Low-budget independence

Horror has cheap and accessible production requirements; unlike science-fiction, horror does not need spaceships and technology. The 'iconography'


David Cronenberg


John Shackleton's We Are Monters

WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

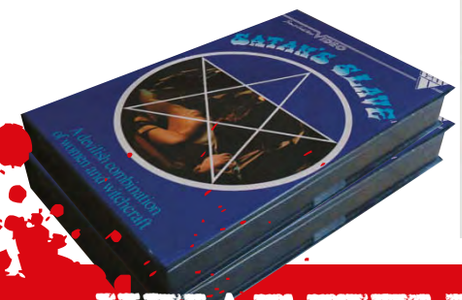
John Shackleton, writer-producer of Panic Button (2011), We Are Monsters and the forthcoming The Sleeping Room: "My requirements with a movie are quite simple really. Entertain me, take me on a journey somewhere new and different, even challenging. Once I'm there, you can do what you like with me, shock me, scare me, make me laugh, make me cry at your will, just return me to my chair in one piece by the time the credits roll and I'll be a happy bunny! Cinema for me is escapism and I like to experience something from it that I can't get from day to day living or anywhere else in my life.

Horror is such a broad genre that it's almost becoming a bit of a catchall nowadays. Provided that there's a character with some malicious intent in there, it can (and invariably often does) stretch to cover thriller, sci-fi, comedy and drama, and there are so many horror sub-genres going on that you'd be really hard-pressed not to find one that fits your story.

The beauty of adding the horror label to your work, particularly for new and emerging filmmakers is that your film can be more readily accepted as concept and ideas driven. Provided that it is (ideas driven), well executed and connects with an audience, then it can be made for a fraction of the cost of a straight drama or sci-fi for example, without the need for an A-list cast, big SFX set pieces and, thus, hefty budgets to bring to life. These films still can (and certainly do) perform well to large audiences around the world. Horror enables filmmakers a greater degree of creative freedom and, provided that they deliver on some fresh ideas, they will generally find that they can find an audience for their work, and be able to establish a career from there."


Tobe Hooper

of horror, in fact, makes it work best without the paraphernalia of high-budget production, when things are kept gritty and 'real'. A remote farmhouse, some nearby woods: throw in several screaming victims, a phallic murder weapon and a masked killer and you have the classic horror film formula. All of this is very accessible to the low budget independent filmmaker.



The Universal monster movie of the 1930s and 1940s such as Frankenstein (1931), The Mummy (1932) and The Wolfman (1942) were medium-budget studio bound affairs. Even I was a Teenage Werewolf was shot on a Hollywood back-lot. But the development of technology in the 1960s meant that filmmaking became cheaper, more accessible and more mobile, and therefore within the scope of low budget independent producers. The Éclair NPR camera was designed for news cameramen working in the field in Korea and later in the Vietnam war. It shot 16mm in ten minute rolls. Add a portable Nagra recorder that captured sound




Ethan Hawke in Scott Derrickson's Sinister

by crystal sync (no cables to the camera required) and you could shoot a feature film in your back yard, and blow the negative up to 35mm to distribute it. This is what director Tobe Hooper did with the Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974); shot on an Eclair NPR and edited on a flat-bed Steenbeck in his kitchen. Dozens of low budget horror films were shot this way as 'back yard productions'.

Independence was not limited to American producers and directors of horror in the 1970s either. Here in Britain, starting in 1974, the British director Pete Walker made a series of 'terror pictures' that actively subverted the traditions of Hammer, shooting them in real locations as opposed to at Bray Studios, deliberately courting controversy in terms of their taboo subject matter: 'fladge-fantasy' (House of Whipcord, 1974), cannibalism in suburbia (Frightmare, 1974), psycho-killer priests (House of Mortal Sin, 1976). Walker funded all of his movies himself, shot them with a crack crew at a furious pace and sold them to the American drive-in market. Others followed suit, like Norman J. Warren (Satan's Slave, 1976, Terror and Prey, both 1978). For a brief time, independent horror thrived in Britain as it did in the

WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

Steven Sheil, writer-director of Mum and Dad (2008) and Dead Mine (2012), co-programmer of the Mayhem Horror Flm Festival:
"The reason I love making horror films is because they give us the opportunity to explore fundamental questions - Why do people hurt one another? and What happens when we die? They focus on uncommon or extreme mindsets, people (or creatures) who view the world in a different way to the norm - and they allow us to experience those mindsets vicariously, and perhaps go some way to understanding them. Horror films examine the mutability of the body and the mind, they explore difference and transformation. They give us a space to explore our deepest anxieties and to confront our worst fears, to transgress for a short time with the knowledge that we can step back onto solid ground again when and if we need to. At their best they allow us to see ourselves as both the monsters we all fear becoming and the survivors we hope we can be."


Perry Benson in Steven Sheil's Mum and Dad

WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

Greg Lamberson, the writer and director of Slime City (1988), Snow Shark (2011), Dry Bones and found footage horror The Legend of Six Fingers (both 2013):
"Horror films are no different than indie films in any other genre, except that they're marketable. If a filmmaker makes a good product, he'll have an easier time finding distribution than someone who makes an offbeat indie film, a drama, or a romantic comedy for that matter. Horror is still the one genre that doesn't need name actors attached in order to make it sell. People don't watch horror films to see marquee names, they watch them to get scared. If anything, familiar faces can detract from the fear factor, because it's a reminder to the viewer that what he's watching isn't real. Some of us have horror in our DNA, making it is what we love to do. For others, it's a stepping stone to a more socially acceptable, mainstream platform."



Two young filmmakers (writer-director Sam Qualiana and Andrew Elias) interview a farmer (Bill Brown) about animal slaughters in the found footage horror film The Legend of Six Fingers.

States. But horror runs in cycles, influenced by changing industry factors. When the drive-ins closed down, Walker lost his market. The core horror audience is always there but the business is fickle. Independence in horror is thus characterised by these sometimes brief swells. The savvy filmmaker needs to recognise the wave and know how to ride it.

Blumhouse Productions are a good example. They are the company behind the Paranormal Activity franchise, Insidious (2010), Sinister (2012), Dark Skies, The Purge and the forthcoming Insidious: Chapter 2 (all 2013). Producer Jason Blum understands how to capitalise on the current low-budget horror boom. His films are all produced for under $5 million (some for much less than that), maximising their chances of turning a profit through cinema release and DVD rental and sell-through. He operates a 'European' model of production whereby the directors make the films they want to make, with limited interference, on the proviso that they stay within the budget parameters set. In return, Blumhouse has been able to attract major talent into the stable, such as directors James Wan (Saw, 2004) and Scott Derrickson (The Exorcism of Emily Rose, 2005). Blumhouse does have the benefit of genuine distribution muscle in the form of Lions Gate and Universal, but this is an example of an independent production company successfully riding the horror wave.



Jennifer Carpenter in Scott Derrickson's The Exorcism of Emily Rose

Of course, not all independent horror producers can operate at this level, or need to. Budgets of many a successful indie-horror (both British and American) have been significantly lower than the Blumhouse model, thanks to the cheap cost of shooting afforded by digital. Not all of these secure



James Wan



WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

Chris Cooke, director of One for the Road (2004) and co-programmer of the Mayhem Horror Film Festival:
"I always think that horror remains, unlike many other genres, very clear - it deals with death, our fears, our anxieties, head-on, often graphically. It also exclusively deals in metaphor. Those monsters come from our psyche or they come from our societal fears. Anyway... all of this allows filmmakers plenty of scope to really explore filmmaking: the filmmaking of images, dreams, nightmares of course, but, because the genre is often marked by violence, it means filmmakers can be incredibly dynamic without having to resort to the huge budget of an action movie: a few people trapped in a house defending themselves is all they need. Dynamism is what cinema is all about: after all they're called 'moving pictures'... or they were once anyway. The very best independent horror films are strikingly visual, fast-paced and linger a lot longer in the memory than many other low budget genres (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre is the best example of this) and this gives any new or aspiring filmmaker something to aim for as well as some real competition as, after all, they should be asking themselves all the time: "can I scare the audience?" And audiences go to them wanting filmmakers to push, challenge, provoke and even threaten and intimidate them - they don't go there for a comfortable ride. Horror films should be provocative, either viscerally or psychologically, when they work at their best."



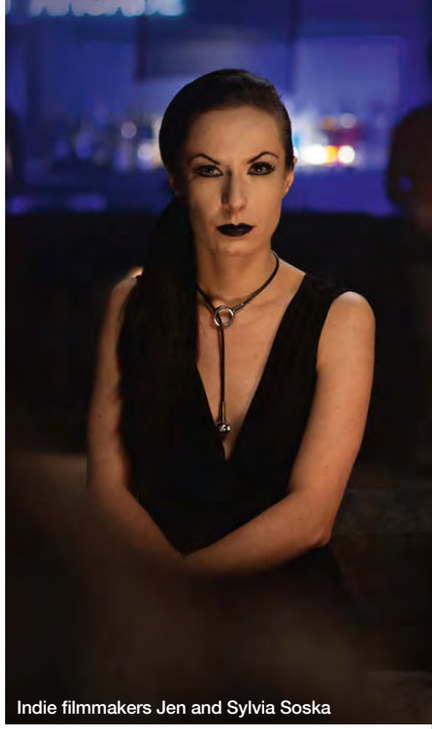
DVD distribution - or may take years to do so - but VOD means that sales can be made, profits (hopefully) recouped and more films produced, making horror more sustainable. And distributors are taking notice: new labels are specialising in independent horror, such as Monster Pictures, who distributed The Fallow Field (2009), Midnight Son (2011) and Excision (2012).

New British horror auteurs are appearing from the UK indie scene and have been for the last several years. Neil Marshall (Dog Soldiers, 2002, The Descent, 2005, Doomsday, 2008), Christopher Smith (Creep, 2004, Severence, 2006, Triangle, 2009, Black Death, 2010), Steven Sheil (Mum and Dad, 2008, Dead Mine, 2012) and Leigh Dovey (The Fallow Field, 2009) - children of the home video revolution all - who started as low-budget independents making shorts, honing their craft and graduating to features. They are the current generation of horror fans turned horror film makers.

Sheil, as well as writing and directing movies, also programmes the Mayhem Horror Festival based in Nottingham. Mayhem is one of a batch of horror festivals to have cropped up in recent years - a great marketplace for independent horror. In the US there are dozens of horror festivals - from Atlanta, Georgia (Buried Alive Horror Film Festival) to Wilmington, North Carolina (Carnage Film Festival); here in the UK we are likewise starting to recognise the horror festival audience, due for the most part to the massive success of Frightfest. In Manchester there is Grimm Fest; Whitby is home to the annual Bram Stoker Film Festival, Aberystwyth has Abertoir; Scotland has Dead by Dawn; even Southend-on-Sea has one, Horror-on-Sea, to great acclaim.



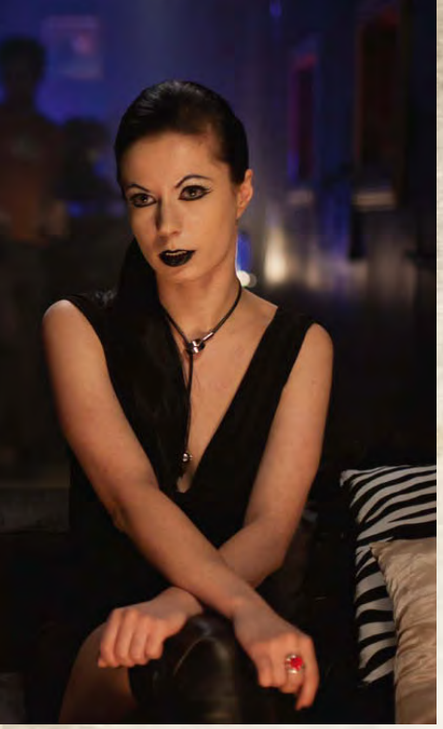



Indie filmmakers Jen and Sylvia Soska

Scary and surreal

The respected film critic, Robin Wood defined the horror film thus: normality is threatened by the monster. It is a simple yet all-encompassing definition - and it offers almost limitless opportunity to the filmmaker for variation and subversion. There's the possibility of combining the tropes of other genres: science-fiction, the thriller, the comedy, even the western (a la Witchfinder General, 1968). Then there is the influence of movements within literature and art - realism, surrealism, expressionism (the classic horror film of the 1930s has been described as a hybrid of surrealism and expressionism. In the 1960s realism took over, but the dream-like influence of surrealism, and in particular the surrealists' interest in Freudian psychoanalysis still features strongly). In recent years postmodernism has offered new toys to play with, allowing film makers to reference other films, make films-within-films, bend genre codes and conventions almost to breaking point.

But despite its malleability



> **The best independent horror films are strikingly visual, fast-paced and linger a lot longer in the memory** - Chris Cooke

the horror film is not for sloppy filmmakers. Cinematic skill is an absolute must. Where would horror be without the subjective camera of John Carpenter (Halloween, 1978), the 'cubist' editing of early George A. Romero (Dawn of the Dead, 1978), the fish-eyed lens paranoia of Roman Polanski (Repulsion, 1965, Rosemary's Baby, 1968, The Tenant, 1976). Audiences want an immersive experience, they want to be involved, to 'believe'; Hitchcock's Psycho is a classic example. Watch the way the maestro orchestrates his scares: the slow-build-up of tension; the careful use of audience positioning; the unexpected shocks; the horrific climax - a virtual catalogue of atrocity. In the words of Romero, horror is for filmmakers who can "really glue their shit together" and requires masterly cinematic technique, from the scripting to the sound mix, to make an audience suspend its disbelief and buy into what is presented on screen.

Beyond that, it allows the filmmaker to transgress society's rules, to be subversive, and to address the issues of the day through the use of parable, metaphor, allegory. Filmmakers can make a statement whilst simultaneously getting under the audience's skin, playing on both the fears of the individual and of society as a whole. The best horror films are at once political and psychological. The Exorcist (1973) played on a fundamental dread of insanity and death, and fear of loss, but also on a lingering superstitious belief in possession. It spoke to society's collective fear, in the wake of the 1960s, of adolescent rebellion, and wider cultural concerns about the generation gap between the old and the young.

The greatest horror films often have an essential ambiguity: are the events supernatural or psychological? Is the house really haunted or is the protagonist going insane? In Val Lewton's classic, Cat People (1942) we never really know if Irena's transformation into a leopard might really happen or is just a delusion. In George A. Romero's Martin (1977), is the titular protagonist really a vampire or does he just think he is?

In the same way, the horror





Alfred Hitchcock, director of such classics as The Birds and Psycho



Image by Jon-Paul Washington

WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

Justin Tagg, writer/director of Mouse-X: "For me, it's not what you show, it's what you don't show - taking information away allows the audience, sat there in the darkness, to fill in the gaps. Our imagination, our anticipation of what is coming is so much more powerful than the reality of what we see or hear.

It's like being a child again, peeping out into the darkness beyond the edges of the bed. There probably isn't anything there, but there could be… there could be… and then every noise just adds to the gruesome picture forming in your mind. The only saviour is to turn the lights on, but they're on the other side of the room - beyond the darkness.

The only exception I can immediately think of is The Wicker Man (1973), when the reality of what happened was even more chilling than my anticipation of it. That's one of the few times when turning the lights on is more scary than keeping them off. Even then, though, the horror was in them leading him up to the Wicker Man, not in him being inside it."

> **It's a genre that by its nature pushes the envelope of "reality" to extreme limits** - Ian Brooker

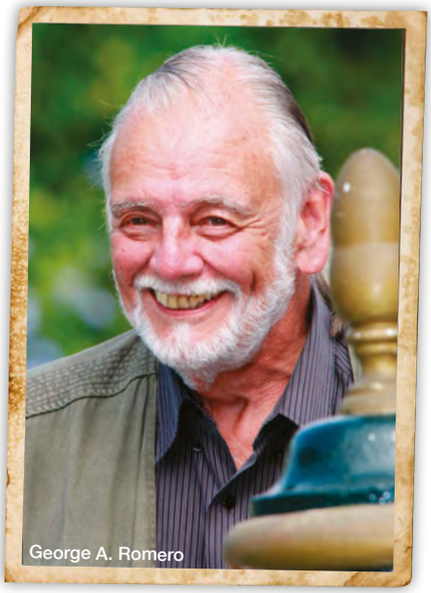
genre thrives on the tension between what is shown and what remains hidden, unseen. Shocking an audience can open their minds to new ideas and splatter can be subversive - as George A. Romero, Frank Henenlotter, David Cronenberg and many others have shown - but our worst fears are often amorphous, vague, generalised, barely glimpsed, and horror cinema is perhaps at its most potent when it nags at us - like anxiety itself.



A scene from John Carpenter's The Fog (1980)

Tom Hewson, publicist, FETCH.FM:
"From a publicist's point of view, one of the reasons why I believe filmmakers love to shoot horror is it's a more financially viable genre than other to access. I'd say it's far more realistic to make a horror film on a relatively low budget and come away with a fantastic film than, say, an action movie. For me, horror films seem to lend themselves greatly to the DIY culture, but still attract a mainstream audience. People just love to be scared!

Take Blumhouse Productions for example, their trajectory over the course of the past 4 years or so has been phenomenal. The Paranormal Activity franchise, Insidious, Sinister, The Bay and Dark Skies have all been hugely successful on such a small budget compared to Hollywood blockbusters. Horror films appeal to huge audiences no matter who the leading star is. It's much more difficult with an action film. Dark Skies, a horror campaign we managed recently, went in at #3 in the charts on its release, with only Jungle Book and Despicable Me topping it! Therefore, not only are they ridiculously fun to make, horror films are also more financially viable for filmmakers (and the studios!) and will find fans in not only the horror community, but also the mainstream."

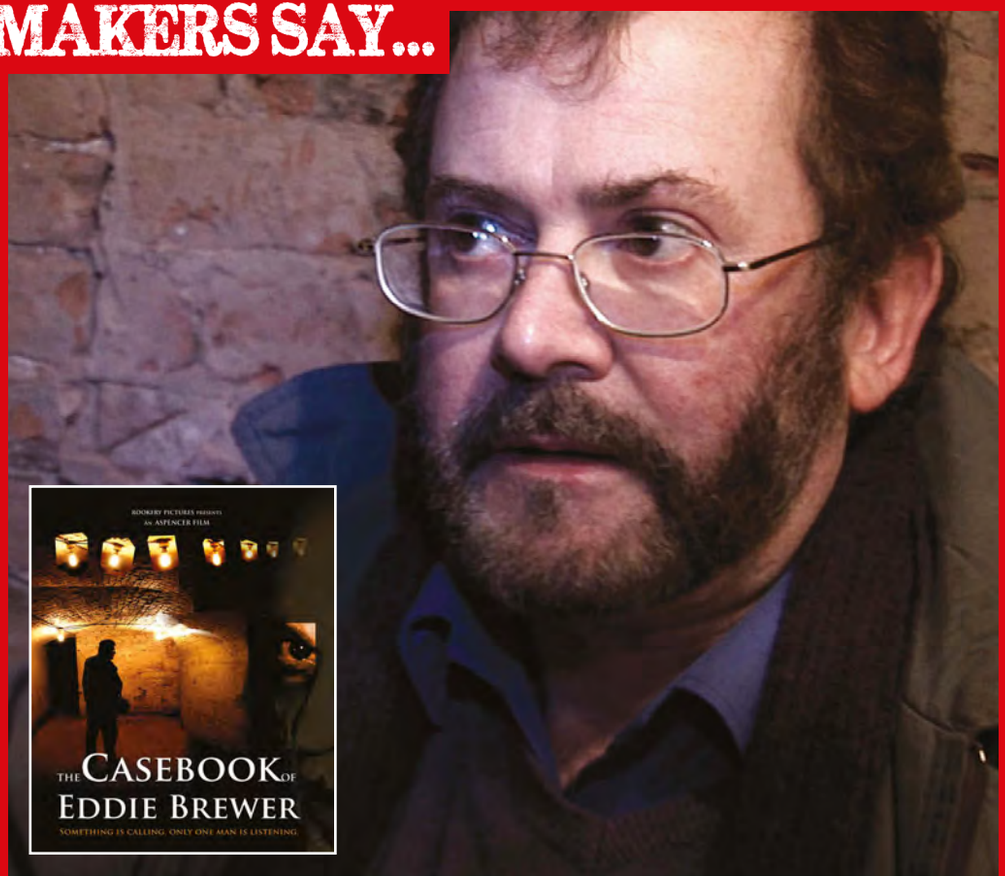


George A. Romero

Jon Towlson's book, Subversive Horror Cinema, is published by McFarland & Co in Spring 2014. Part 2 of this feature follows next issue when Jon will continue with his delve through the movie archives in search of horror. ■

WHAT THE FILMMAKERS SAY...

Ian Brooker, producer and star of The Casebook of Eddie Brewer:
"In the UK, and particularly in the USA, there seems to be an almost insatiable appetite for horror: whether it be zombie, vampire, slasher, torture-porn, found-footage and even more traditional ghost story movies. Horror cinema as a genre is so wide and flexible - it encompasses many sub genres and can be set at any period and filmed in any style. Anything seems possible and the impossible believable. It's a genre that, by its nature, pushes the envelope of 'reality' to extreme limits and to what is perceived as acceptable and in good taste. It's exciting and challenging for the filmmakers as well as the audience. The subject can fire the imagination of filmmakers far more than in any other genre - with perhaps the exceptions of high budget sci-fi or disaster movies - and inspire those working on the films: actors, technicians and make-up artists to be ever more creative with sometimes limited resources. Horror films can be made for relatively little money and locations used are often dark, dank and unpleasant - again testing the endurance of those participating, whilst adding to the visual and visceral impact of the film."

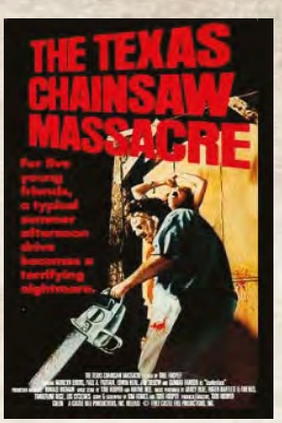


Night of the Living Dead (1968)

George A. Romero's gut-munching classic broke the boundaries of screen gore on its first release. Director Romero shot the movie for under $100,000, raising the seed finance from a group of ten investors made up of family and friends, each of whom pitched in $1000. Using the 35mm camera owned by his production company, Latent Image (they made table-top beer commercials) Romero and his associates shot the movie on weekends with local talent, casting a black actor, Duane Jones, as the lead, a daring move at the time. Night of the Living Dead became a huge hit but copyright issues placed the film in the public domain, meaning Romero and his investors never got their due.



The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)



Inspired by the success of Night of The Living Dead, Austin-based filmmaker, Tobe Hooper shot this classic 'meat movie' using a crew of ex-students from the University of Texas, with a cash budget of $160,000 on a six week schedule. The DoP Daniel Pearl is the film's unsung hero, achieving striking cinematography on 16mm, shooting on colour reversal stock ASA 25. The stunning tracking shots were achieved using only 40ft of track. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre grossed $6,000,000 in its first year in the US alone and made third place in Variety's annual list of box office hits of 1974; subsequently it was re-released every year for the next seven years. The film is estimated to have grossed $100,000,000 dollars worldwide. Unfortunately the distributor, Bryanston, was run by the mafia; neither Hooper his cast and crew, nor the investors saw much of the profits.

The Evil Dead (1982)

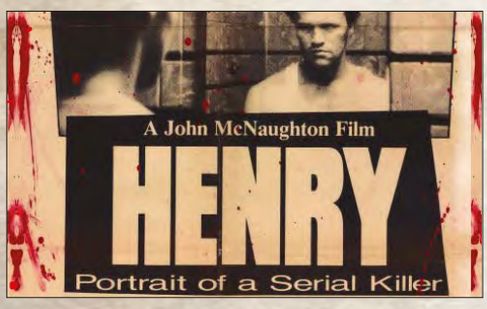
Sam Raimi's debut feature was shot in the Michigan woods for $90,000 raised from private investors. Like Night of the Living Dead and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre the story takes place in one long, hellish night and might be considered one of the first postmodern horror films in terms of its conscious referencing of other classic horror films. Originally entitled The Book of the Dead, the release title was the brainchild of veteran producer Irvin Shapiro (proving that a catchy title helps to sell a horror film). The movie took off on home video in the UK, one of the first releases of the innovative Palace Pictures, until it was seized by police during the 'video nasty' furore in the mid-1980s. Raimi came to England to defend the film against the Director of Public Prosecutions but went away unheard. He went on to become a Hollywood A-Lister with the Spiderman franchise.



CLASSIC INDEPENDENT HORROR FILMS

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986)

Another favourite of the British censor (!) is John McNaughton's feature debut, shot in Chicago for $100,000. McNaughton was working for an audio-visual company called MPI Video at the time they offered him the money to make a horror film - an offer he couldn't refuse. The finished movie was a tough sell and sat on the shelf for several years until festival showings brought it notoriety, attracting the attention of UK distributor Electric Pictures who submitted it, with cuts, to the BBFC. The chief-censor James Ferman infamously re-edited one of the film's more controversial scenes himself to make it less… controversial. Martin Scorsese loved the film and offered McNaughton the chance to direct Mad Dog and Glory (1993) starring Robert De Niro, Uma Thurman and Bill Murray.





The Blair Witch Project (1999)

If any movie could be called a 'game-changer' it is this one. Shot in the Maryland woods with a trio of amateur actors brandishing camcorders, the film that launched the 'found footage' horror sub-genre was the feature debut of Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick. Filming took place in 1994 over a period of eight days, with the resulting 19 hours of footage edited down to 90 minutes over a period of nine months by Myrick and Sanchez. The filmmakers sold the finished film to the distributor Artisan, for $1.1 million. After a marketing spend of $25 million (which included a then-innovative online campaign) the film eventually recouped $248.6 million worldwide against a production budget of $25,000 thereby making The Blair Witch Project one of the most successful independent films ever made.

Paranormal Activity (2008)

Shot on a camcorder in seven days on a budget of $15,000 with a cast of unknowns, Oren Peli's indie feature debut caught the eye of Steven Spielberg at Dreamworks after a screening at Scream Fest, America's biggest horror film festival. Dreamworks initially wanted to ditch the original film and have Peli direct a remake on a higher budget, but Peli and then-Miramax senior executive Jason Blum persuaded them to hold a test screening to show that the film would play to an audience. When audiences members started walking out of the test screening Dreamworks were ready to shelve the film, until they realised that the people were walking out because they were scared.



MOVING CAMERAS FOR DRAMA PART 2

In the second part of his look at moving the camera to add production value, Director Sean J Vincent looks at crash cams, action cams and stabilisers

Last month we looked at moving the camera in various cinematic ways to make your movies more interesting to look at and draw attention to the right parts of the story. Sometimes, just moving your camera isn't enough. Ever since the early days of filmmaking, directors have been looking for interesting ways to capture movement in scenes by making the camera move with the action rather than just as a 'viewer'.

Car mounts

By mounting cameras on vehicles a new dynamic is instantly created. Everyone has seen the ubiquitous driving shot through the windscreen on a low-loader, or maybe shot from the passenger side on what's known as a 'hostess tray'.





A Sony FS100, dual-suction mounted

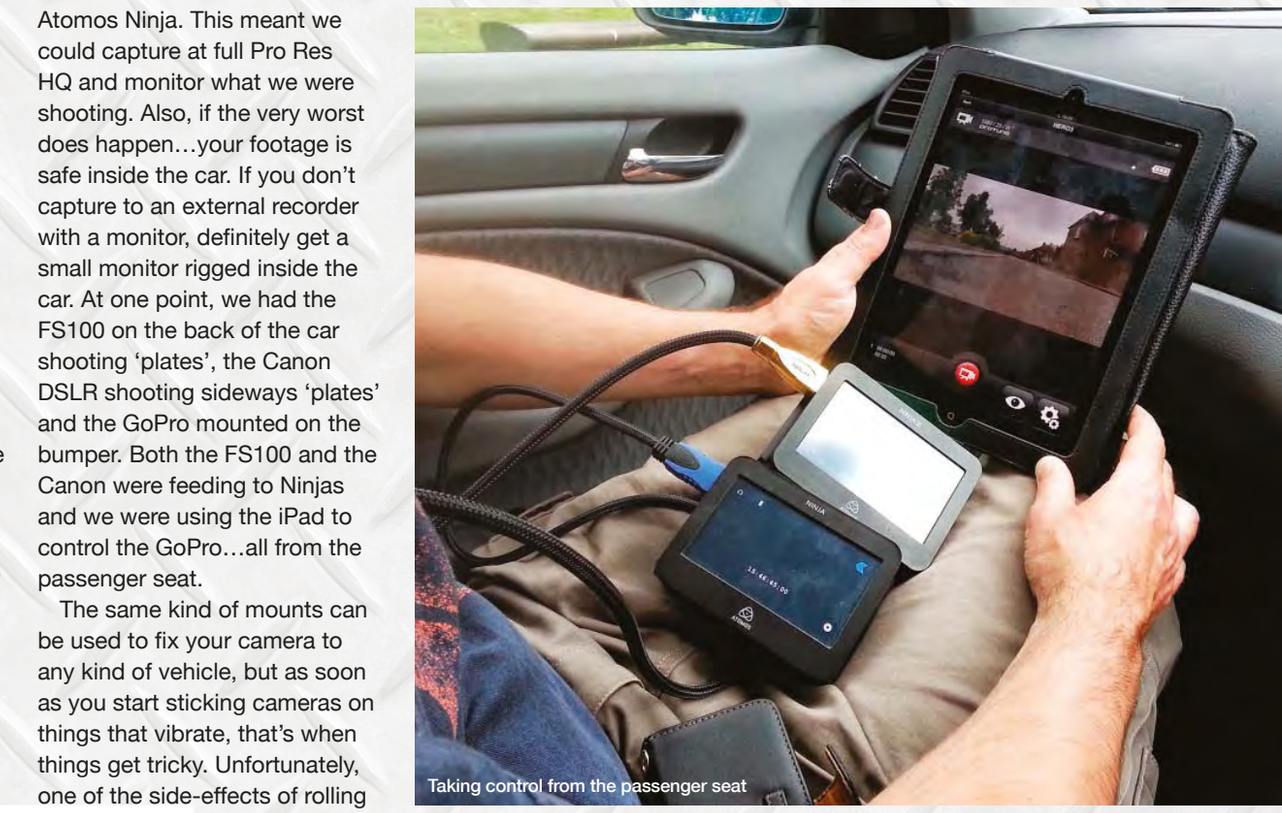
Maintenance

When you trust your camera to a mounting system and begin shooting footage on the outside of a moving vehicle, you need to be sure that the mount is safe and secure and well-maintained. It's also vital to make sure your camera is ready to work. There's nothing more annoying than rigging a car up and planning a route to get the right footage, only to find a dirty sensor has ruined your shot. It happens. Check and clean your sensor often. Respect your camera. Dust and dirt flying into it at high-speed needs to be either protected against, or you'll need to clean it afterwards.

There are several ways to mount cameras on cars. These days, cameras are smaller and lighter, so simple dual-suction mount set-ups allow you to mount your main camera almost anywhere on a car. We used one of these to shoot a lot of the car shots in Seven Cases. It's very reliable and safe and they can easily take the weight of cameras like the FS700, FS100, DSLRs and the Canon C range. I'd always advise adding some extra security in the form of some bungees or a ratchet strap just in case, but in practice, I've never had one of these mounts fail. Here's a tip…the windows are far less likely to flex and are a better place to mount suction cups.

To make matters easier and to keep an eye what is going on with the camera on the outside of the car, we ran an HDMI cable inside the car and into an Atomos Ninja. This meant we could capture at full Pro Res HQ and monitor what we were shooting. Also, if the very worst does happen…your footage is safe inside the car. If you don't capture to an external recorder with a monitor, definitely get a small monitor rigged inside the car. At one point, we had the FS100 on the back of the car shooting 'plates', the Canon DSLR shooting sideways 'plates' and the GoPro mounted on the bumper. Both the FS100 and the Canon were feeding to Ninjas and we were using the iPad to control the GoPro…all from the passenger seat.

The same kind of mounts can be used to fix your camera to any kind of vehicle, but as soon as you start sticking cameras on things that vibrate, that's when things get tricky. Unfortunately, one of the side-effects of rolling shutters (as found on most DSLRs and the more affordable super 35mm cameras) is something called 'jello'. This shows itself as literally a jelly effect over your footage…things appear to wobble and the footage is both unusable and unrecoverable. To avoid this, you need to physically disconnect the camera from the source of the vibration. This can be achieved used a combination of various thicknesses and densities of rubber and also by adding suspension


Taking control from the passenger seat



Rent or buy?

Things like gimbal stabilisers and car mounts can be expensive for indie productions, so consider renting them if you only need them for a specific production. There's really not much point on spending hundreds or even thousands on a clever camera mounting system if it's not going to earn its keep. If you make contact with other local filmmakers, you might be able to pool your resources and share these kind of tools. If you do decide to buy, don't skimp on the cheapest option. It's worth remembering that a cheap piece of kit will always only ever be that…but quality gear will last the test of time.

similar to that found on radio-controlled cars. It can take a long time to 'tune out' the vibrations, but it can be done with patience.

Motorized gimbals

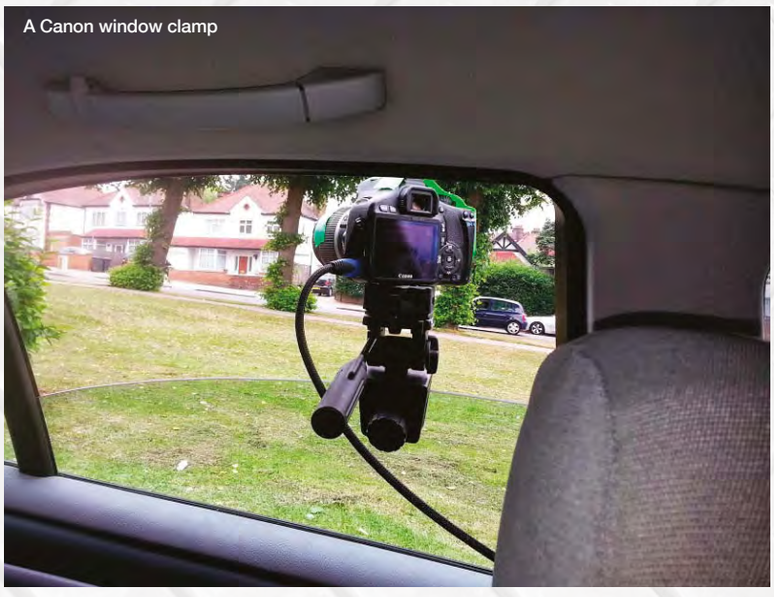
The bigger movements that stop the camera shooting fluid footage are dealt with by using motorised gimbals. The radio-controlled helicopter filming community developed them for getting stunning aerial footage using either a helicopter, quadcopter or other aerial platform. But…some bright spark realised that if you took this motorised gimbal stabiliser and mounted it on something you could hold, a new breed of ultra-steady shots was possible even while the camera op was running.

This first to become known was the Movi. This $15,000 rig has taken the industry by storm and rental houses are investing in them heavily. But it's all about to change and for the benefit of indie filmmakers like us. The Movi has competition from various other contenders, my favourites so far are the DEFY G2 and G5. The G2 can take 2lbs and the G5 5lbs. So the G5 can take a decent-sized DSLR and get some stunning moving footage. They work in a very similar way to the Movi, but at a fraction of the cost.



The Movi rig took the film industry by storm





A Canon window clamp

> **We used GoPro cameras on quadcopters, RC cars, on the bumper of real cars and for 'drive over' shots in the road itself**

By either using a small on-board joystick or by utilising a second operator, the camera can be controlled while completely avoiding the jerks and movements of the camera operator. These types of stabiliser are the new craze in camera movement, as not only do they allow you to achieve stunningly smooth shots, but they do it with a fraction of the set-up hassle of dollys, tracks, jibs… And, of course, you can shoot for as long as you can manage to keep the camera steady, which with practice could be a very long time.

Action cameras

A few years ago, action cams began to appear. Small in size and high in quality, these little wonders allow us to put cameras in places our main camera either can't go, or places we wouldn't dare put them. The big contenders in his market or the Contour range, the Sony HDR-AS15, the JVC GC-XA1 and the ever-popular GoPro range. These tiny HD cameras can be mounted pretty much anywhere. We used a GoPro Hero 3 on Seven Cases to get some really unique shots of the car.

The clever mounting system means you can position the cameras wherever you want and feel safe that they won't fail. We've used GoPro cameras on

quadcopters, on RC cars, on the bumper of real cars and for 'drive over' shots in the road itself. I also position it in various places on location to get some unexpected angles, which are often really useful in the edit.

Perhaps one of the issues with action cams like the GoPro is the lack of mounting options that are compatible with your other professional gear. Various manufacturers are producing 'cages' for the GoPro cameras now, but the Genus GoPro cage also features a 52mm thread mount on the front of the lens. This allows me to add ND filters; effect filters and also lens adapters - really useful. It also has loads of proper mounting holes as well as access to the HDMI socket. By using this cage I can mount the GoPro using my professional grip gear as opposed to the plastic mounts. The sold construction means that even if the camera should fall, it will be well protected.

Mounting action cams is one of the ways that you can really get creative. You can now mount cameras on heads, on guns, on machinery and even underwater, without any real planning. The footage is often a bit lacking in quality compared to your main camera, but with some clever noise reduction and post treatment, the audience probably won't notice and if it helps tell your story…why worry?

Crash cams

Crash cams have been the preserve of big-budget movies in the past, as you're basically destroying your equipment to get a shot. For example, a typical crash cam shot would be the front view of car as it crashes into another car, or a building perhaps. In the past, you'd mount the cheapest camera you could find where you wanted it and hope that whatever protection you added to it protected it enough to preserve the footage. The camera was then pretty much scrap.

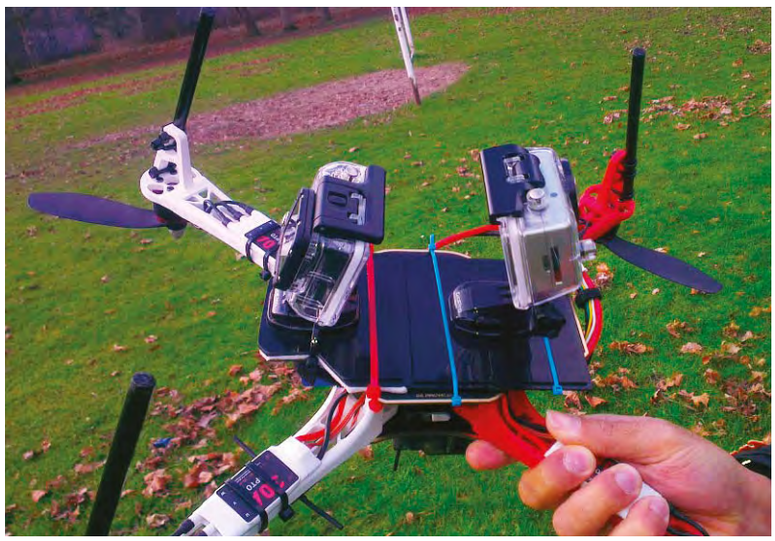
These days, we don't have to sacrifice quality for crash cams. DSLRs like the 5D Mk II made the crash cam able to shoot 24 or 25p and at full frame resolutions. Added to the compact size and (relatively) low cost, they became the crash cam of choice for the professional industry. Simply mount it in a pelicase rammed with foam and leave a cut out for the lens and record button. But, progress never stops and now we can use GoPro cameras for a lot of crash-type footage and the best bit is, you can usually recover your camera and it'll be okay.

Conclusion

So where does all this choice of ways to capture exciting moving footage leave us? We're spoilt for choice. We can mount cameras anywhere, move them anyhow we like and we're pretty much always shooting at a decent quality these days. Is there still room for a regular hand-held shot? Of course. Hand-held shots still offer a unique urgency and intimacy that smooth shots often don't. As I've said before, too much of anything isn't a good look in film. A film full of dolly shots gets boring quickly, just as much as a film full of stabiliser shots will. Mix it up. Use the best option that the scene demands. ■

Safety first!

Doing clever things with cameras is often a risk to your equipment, but it can also be a risk to you and others around you. Make sure the rig is safe and the camera is unable to come free. Even if you trust a mounting system, add a safety line so that it can't fall far and hurt someone. Check your insurance too. You might not be covered if your camera comes flying off a helicopter at a hundred miles per hour! Clearly, crash cams are not insurable, so make sure you're going to get the shot first time and that if the camera is going to be destroyed, you, your producer or your Dad or whoever owns it, knows all about it.



Quadcopters can be a good option to try



PARTNERS IN CRIME

Q&A

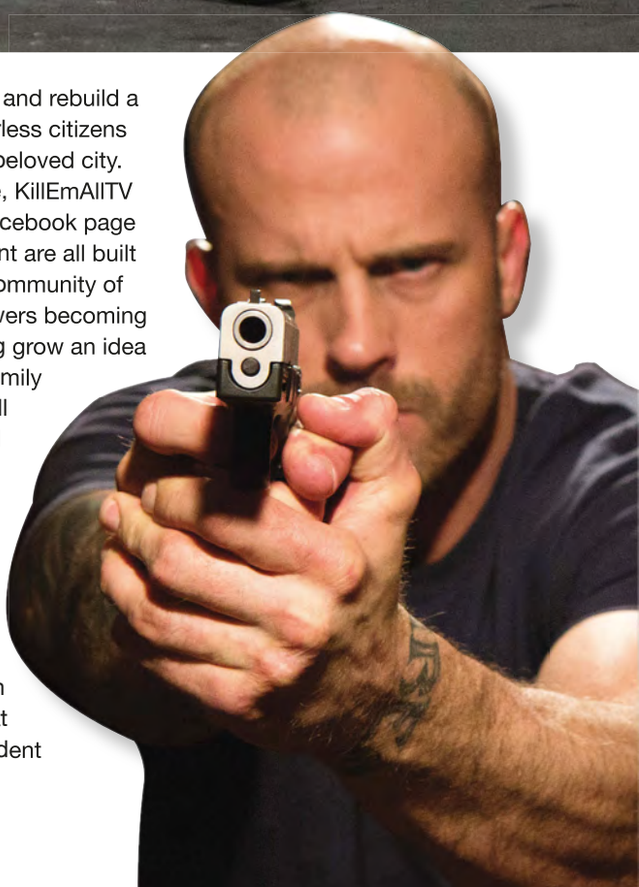
Digital FilmMaker takes a look at Kill Em All, an internet crime-drama web series and website, with its writer Jesse Pringle and director Shawn Wright

What is Kill Em All?

Jesse: Kill Em All is an internet crime-drama web series and website, www.killemalltv.com, which is built around the idea of providing broadcast-ready entertainment for the mobile technology user and viewer on the go.

The story of Kill Em All is, essentially, a modern day crime tale about an Irish American man and his plot for revenge against the Italian crime family who were responsible for the deaths of his mother and father when he was a child, and now his older brother too. The main character, Carson McCullough, and his brother Clinton grew up in Kansas City, a town historically known for its mafia background. From Al Capone to the modern day, there has always been an element of intimidation and fear among the people who live under the 'Black Hand' of the crime family. Carson's father was a hit man for the mob and when he decided to cross them, he and his wife, Carson and Clinton's mother were killed in a car bomb. As children, the two brothers grew up learning the ropes of organized crime and began collecting for the mob, just as their father did.

Carson decided to escape by moving to California to start a new life without the worry of always looking over his shoulder. That was until his brother Clinton was killed. Now Carson has returned to Kansas City, teaming up with his brothers widow Kate and mentor Quinn Flannigan to eliminate those responsible and rebuild a community of fearless citizens taking back their beloved city. The story, website, KillEmAllTV YouTube page, Facebook page and Twitter account are all built on the idea of a community of followers and viewers becoming involved in helping grow an idea and story into a family and community, all pushing for a goal of independent, self-sustaining storytelling and film production, without the strong arm of the big studios.



Shawn: My own take on it all is that this is an independent



Working around the clock

web series created by Jesse Pringle who is the writer, producer and lead character, Carson McCullough. Together, he and I are producing 10 episodes that run between 6 and 10 minutes and will be presented at our website, www.killemalltv.com. All of the episodes are shot using Kansas City crew and equipment has been provided by Kansas City vendors. The idea was to be able to tell a feature-length story, but break it down into episodes to make shooting on a low-budget more manageable. We are also embracing mobile devices and sites like YouTube and Vimeo that are extemely popular means of viewing new content. We are trying to deliver a large amount of drama in a pretty short period of time. So a web series is a perfect way to do that.

The story revolves around Carson McCullough, an Irish American man who discovers you can't always escape your past. Sometimes you have to confront it. When Carson's brother Clinton, the last of his remaining family, turns up dead in Kansas City, Carson is forced to return to the underworld to hunt down those responsible for his death and put an end to a crime dynasty that has controlled the McCullough family for decades. Carson is joined by his widowed sister-in-law, Kate, in the mission to stop the Martucci family and avenge the deaths of the people they loved the most. Carson and Kate are joined and confronted by a dynamic cast of gangsters, thugs, politicians, and cops too.

How did the project come about?

Shawn: Jesse and I connected on Facebook while he was working in LA acting, doing stunts and producing. We had a lot of mutual friends, but never really knew each other. Oddly enough, we went to the same grade school and high school, but just ran in different crowds. He had seen that I make a living working on films and commercials and was interested in getting together to talk and maybe work on a project when he came back to visit family. I had a script that I wanted him to read and he had some of his own ideas. On one visit he called me in the afternoon and said that we should shoot a music video that night. And we did. We shot the video in about 4 hours at various places around Kansas City. With two lights and a Canon 7D.

After that, we realised we could tell interesting stories without a ton of people or equipment. We just needed a good concept and a plan and then make the most out of our minimal resources. So we started shooting what would be Kill Em All. The first shoot was Jesse and Dan (the actor that plays Danny Spiletto). We went to a park at 10 in the evening. We had a generator, two lights and a 7D. Jesse and Dan did a dialogue scene with some action and they also helped set lights and move the generator. We did the ADR at Jesse's house. And that was day one of Episode 1. Things have grown a bit since then, but we try to start each episode with the 'less is more' approach.

Can you tell us about the background of the people involved?

Shawn: I went to school at the University of Missouri and studied radio and TV production. When I got out, I worked as a PA and studio manager for a film production company in Kansas City. From there, I started working with film and digital formats as a camera assistant, tech, and eventually DOP. Jesse was a songwriter, musician and performer with a background in theater, and he also played football. With that background it really prepared him for acting in independent films with action and fight choreography. And, with being a touring independent musician, he has a tremendous background for marketing and publicity, which helps for getting Kill Em All into the public eye. The rest of the crew are mostly professionals in the KC area. A lot are friends or colleagues that I have done favours for, or had a good working relationship with over the years.

So what made you decide on a web series?

Shawn: The web series allowed us to tell a feature-length story, but break it up into smaller pieces. It's easier to get a solid crew for 1 or 2 shoot days and then wait a while and shoot again in a month. It's easier to get a volunteer crew or low-budget crew when you ask less of them over a larger period

"Oddly enough, we went to the same grade school and high school, but just ran in different crowds - Shawn Wright



of time. We also liked the episodic nature. It's cool to have 10 independent stories that build up into one larger story. This makes it perfect for the internet, because YouTube and Vimeo have become so popular for informing and entertaining people. There is a huge audience on the internet looking for an engaging story that they can experience in a short period of time. These episodes are perfect for that.

How does this differ to traditional TV or filmmaking?

Shawn: It really is the same process in terms of production. You can spend as much or as little money as you want. There aren't really any rules. Technically, I think you can get away with some cheaper forms of acquisition as far as camera equipment. Using a DSLR is great, because you can run and gun easier because the camera is lightweight and small, and doing multiple camera shoots can be much cheaper as well. I would not necesarily recommend a 7D for television or theatrical presentation, but with the web series you are typically dealing with smaller viewing screens and there really aren't any regulations about specifications of the image.

Also, since the episodes are shorter, you obviously save money in that respect. As far as presentation and distribution, you have the ability to put your story in front of millions of people without having to acquire distribution or wait for a studio to pick up your film. Jesse was very proactive about getting a team to put together a website and he tracks the analytics on YouTube. Social Media is a great way to get the word out. It's not easier to get the views, you still have to work at it, but it puts the control in your hands without having to spend a fortune on marketing materials.

What are the challenges with promoting it?

Shawn: The only challenges are really understanding how social media works. How do you increase your audience on the web? We have a social media professional who has consulted with us on ways to increase traffic. At the end of the day, it's the same principal as it's always been. Get your idea in peoples faces. The difference is that now you don't necessarily have to spend money on stickers, t-shirts, billboards and commercials. Sure, that helps, but you just have to make contacts and give those contacts something great to look at. If it really is good, then word of mouth will do the work. Everyone that likes it will advertise on their Facebook or Twitter for you. You still have to push it just as hard as you did before social media, but you don't have to spend millions getting marketing materials distributed around the world.





How come you can afford to hire a crew of 30-40 people?

Shawn: Independent projects are often a labour of love. We are fortunate to have a community of professionals in Kansas City who are passionate about making movies and telling interesting stories. Many of the people involved are people that I have done favours for in the past, or will do favours for on future projects. That goes a long way in the indy community. Some of the crew are good friends of ours, and we help each other whenever we can. There are also some very talented people that are looking to sharpen their skills in areas that they don't typically get to work in. Or they are looking for demo pieces that are outside the normal commercial realm.

When we get paid work, we try to hook up the people that have helped us on the episodes. It's all about returning the favour. We just want everyone to have a great filmmaking experience and to this point the people involved are getting that and are proud of the work that they are doing. Ultimately, we would all like to be able to make a living making films and telling unique stories. For now, we are doing the groundwork. Everyone involved has donated their time. If we can put out a great product, it will give potential investors a reason to back our project. Right now, the money comes out of Jesse's pocket and my pocket, from our day jobs. We aren't getting paid for this either. We make the shoots comfortable with food and drinks and offer a unique experience.

You've also got some Hollywood talent on-board too right? Tell us about that.

Jesse: While working as an actor in Los Angeles I was fortunate to make friends with some Hollywood greats, both past and present. When I posed the idea of independently writing and producing a web series, several of these name talent actors agreed to fly out to KC and be a part of the story. With the help of having Hollywood talent, it makes the Kill





Going over the script

Working as an actor in Los Angeles I was fortunate to make friends with some Hollywood greats - Jesse Pringle

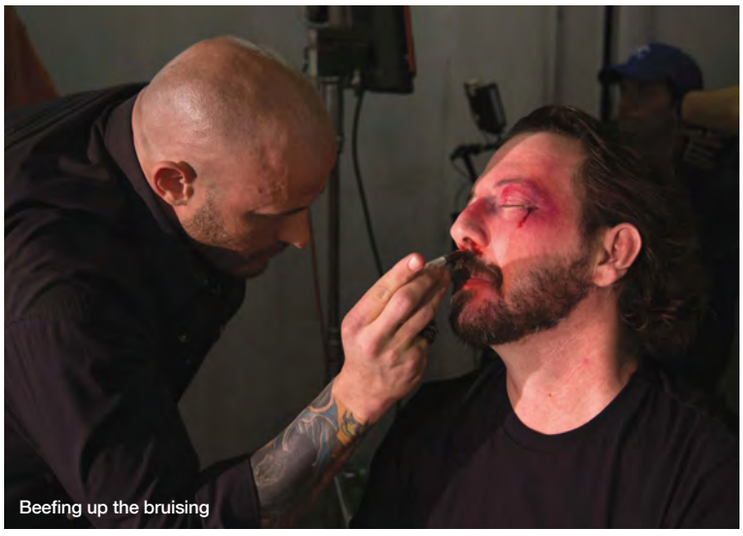


Em All series gain marquee value and really adds to the mystique of the series and how it was brought together. Our first Hollywood name attached is Richard Tyson of feature films such as 3 O' Clock High, Black Hawk Down, and There's Something About Mary. Richard was in Kansas City for almost a week participating in media and promotional events and a full 13 hour day of filming and he did not complain once.

When dealing with name talent, sometimes you get attitude. However, in Richards case he was very helpful and gracious in actually helping become part of the process and lending advice when needed. Long-time stunt driver and business consultant James 'Jimmy Z' Zahnd of www.Zcrane.com has also been a huge help with the building of our story through lending advice and ideas with regard to direction for the future of the series and negotiating new Hollywood talent and crew to become involved with our project. There are more names to be mentioned and added in future episodes, and we are very excited and humbled to have them as part of the Kill Em All team.

So what do you offer the viewer, and what sets you apart from the rest of the crowd?

Shawn: We do our best to make a 6-10 minute episode feel as grand and intriguing as an hour-long program. The right amount of drama, violence, action, and interesting characters and just putting out the best work we can. It's an action web series with stunts. But, at the same time, we get into the characters mind and we show depth to their unique human experience. We provide a little mystery, so that the audience asks questions and then we let the story unravel and answer those questions episode



Beefing up the bruising



Filming out on location

by episode. And, we are fortunate to have a crew mostly comprised of professonal people and talent that makes it look as real and as captivating as we can, because we love the work.

Jesse: I agree with Shawn but will continue by saying that with the help of Hollywood names coming to be involved with our series, it helps Kill Em All stand taller than most.

Can you tell us about the kit you're using?

Shawn: We are using Canon 7D and 5D DSLR cameras. I own a range of Canon L series zooms and have a small HD DP6 monitor. We've also been using a Sachtler FSB8. On occasion, we can work out a jib or steadicam. If we can't do that, we use a small handheld glidecam without an arm or vest. I have a pro aim handheld rig that was inexpensive and gets the job done. Sometimes one of our camera operators will provide an extra camera body so we can get double coverage, or have a camera dedicated to steadicam or jib work.

Any tips and tricks for fellow filmmakers?

Shawn: Try to keep things simple. Write a script that can be executed quickly. One location per day, or a location that has multiple possibilities. Strip things down. We've done some big set-ups, but half of what we've done so far was just Jesse and I, a camera, and one or two lights. Also, be prepared to adapt to changes in your shoot day. Sometimes you don't get the light you wanted, or an actor doesn't show up or, you don't get every shot that you had in your mind. Get okay with things not being perfect and figure out how to adapt and still tell an interesting story as best you can.



Often on an indy project things do go wrong, but you still have to make your day while you have the equipment and resources. If you throw in the towel, then you've just lost a bunch of time, favours, money and opportunity. You don't have the luxury of a million dollar budget and people working around the clock for 6 months. You may have 12 hours to shoot 8 pages. Can it be done? Hell yeah, it can be done, and if it can't, tell the story the best you can. If you go with the flow, sometimes you are amazed at the way things come out. Also, donate your time to other peoples projects. That's part of what makes the indy world go around. Those favours will come back to you.





Would you describe yourselves as gorilla filmmakers, or is this a carefully considered project?

Shawn: To a large extent we are gorilla filmmakers because we'll go out with a camera and just make things happen when it can be done with minimal lighting and MOS. If it's pickup shots with Carson (Jesse) or another single character, we'll find a location and just start shooting without permission. However, on the bigger shoot days when we have a crew and professional talent, we make sure everything is as buttoned down as possible. Jesse handles talent, locations, catering, make-up and the art department. I will handle the crew, equipment, storyboards and shot list with our AD Emily Herold.

She puts together the call sheet and schedule after we've worked that out together. Our DOP Andy Romero is also involved in a location scouts and figuring out what equipment we need. He always tries to work with natural light and keep things simple. Jesse and I were getting overwhelmed with post-production while shooting subsequent episodes. So we have been fortunate to assemble a post-production team led by post supervisor Anthony Ladesich. Taylre Jones is on Color Correction and Visual FX. CJ Drumeller is on Sound Design. We've definitely developed a method to our madness. That's really just so we can be as efficient as possible.

What's the overall objective for Kill em All?

Shawn: To be able to share unique and thrilling stories with the rest of the world. We want to give our audience a thrill. The dream is to be able make a living doing just that and hopefully this will give us and the rest of the crew some other opportunities down the road. On top of being a great producer, Jesse is a powerhouse actor with dramatic chops as well as physical ability. This project really showcases that, and gives the actors an opportunity to demonstrate their range. We all love what we do anyway, whether it's commercial, or a corporate video, or shooting a concert, but making movies is why most of us got into this. We all love working together and wanna have the ability to keep telling stories.

How long will it run and what does the team have planned next?

Shawn: We are gonna keep moving forward with Carson McCullough and Kill Em All. It's a blast and has a fun energy. Jesse and I have discussed a variety of other projects. Dramas, comedies. We just want to be able to do these projects and support our crews and talent and give everyone opportunities that they deserve.

Jesse: I agree with Shawn with moving forward with the Kill Em All series. It is our goal to not only continue to film and distribute the series on the web, but to also become involved in film festivals, prepare to build the series for broadcast pickup. And, I am happy to say that we are now discussing searching for investors for a feature film version of the story under a different title, with A-List cast and crew all filming in Kansas City, MO, our home town. It is becoming a dream come true to be able to see our creation come to life such as it is with the Kill Em All web series. Now we are starting to sell merchandise and have Hollywood-style red carpet premieres for every episode release, which makes it feel really genuine and real. Kill Em All is becoming a family affair, a team, and in a lot of ways a 'mob' of professionals all working together for a common goal. ■



ASK THE PRODUCER

Jonathan Sothcott, one of the UK's most prolific indie producers, answers your questions about filmmaking and the industry. He pulls no punches, but he gets films made. You can send your questions to Jonathan via email to dfm@jonathansothcott.com



A SHORT FUSE

This may or may not be a question for a producer, but perhaps you can point me in the right direction. We are planning to shoot a short film in due course, but the project is based on the moors, so it's miles from anywhere. Therefore, can you offer best advice for everyday practicalities, such as lighting and other electrical equipment. Do we need to hire a generator?
Greg, Andover

JS: Yes, you do really and they create their own set of problems if you aren't prepared, as many are very noisy - so before hiring one, go and check it out and make sure it's a quiet one! Also, just because you're in the middle of nowhere, don't forget to alert any nearby residents – urban dwellers are increasingly used to film crews, actors covered in blood and so on, but out in the country people can react in a different way and you don't want anybody shooting your leading man!

NO GUTS, NO GLORY

Your films are notoriously blood-thirsty, so what's the way forward as regards special effects? Can you tell me what I need to make my micro-budget capture the imagination of the public. Is the secret to liberally apply plenty of claret to both the sets and actors, or is this just a cynical attention-grabbing exercise?
Michael, Brentwood

JS: I think all-out gore movies are a thing of the 80s. We've had our share of entrails and offal and to make people sit up and notice you have to be clever these days. Personally, I am a great believer in practical splatter effects rather than the CGI route. If you're going for gore, use it sparingly but well. Many years ago I was the buyer at The Horror Channel

GAME FOR A LAUGH

I'm trying my hand at writing a comedy film and, despite the fact that I possess a great sense of humour, I'm struggling to come up with the laughs. I think one of the problems might be the scriptwriting software that I'm using, which doesn't really seem to be working the magic. Or am I missing something? Is there a quick and easy way to get the laughs?
Adrian, Yeovil

JS: In my experience, comedy is by far the hardest genre to get right - and independent British comedy invariably ends up flat as a pancake (that's why they pay Richard Curtis, Simon Pegg et al the big bucks). I have dabbled in comedy in the past and it was a disastrous experience for all concerned, particularly as it is so easy to get carried away with adlibbing and having fun. Keep comedy scripts short (it's easier to make someone laugh for 80 minutes than 120 minutes) and, as soon as it's in something approaching a decent shape, get hold of some actors and start workshopping it to see how it reads out loud. Do also remember that, unless you make something very glossy and fuzzy in the style of working title, it is very hard to translate British humour to an international audience. That's not to say give up, but there certainly isn't a quick fix to get them rolling in the aisles.



Comedy is difficult to get right

and sat through (well, okay, fast forwarded through) hundreds of shaky-cam zombie films that were liberally splattered with home made blood. After the first few seconds it becomes unintentionally hilarious and then boring. I recently saw a film called The Seasoning House, which was directed by prosthetics whizz Paul Hyett. It wasn't the all-out splatterfest I expected, but when the gore came it was absolutely horrible - less being more. So, search for a young, fresh prosthetics/make-up designer and find them 4 or 5 really visual effects to attempt with skill and care, rather than 8 buckets of powder paint and some sausages. There are no shortage of up-and-coming special make-up effects artists, as shows like Doctor Who have made employment in this field increasingly likely.

ALL IN THE TIMING

I'm keen to hear your thoughts on stunts. We are working on a film at the moment that, while it's not exactly James Bond, does have its fare share of action moments. However, we've got to something of a brick wall in that nobody we know wants to help with the stunts. There's a bit of jumping off buildings and a scene were someone has to be thrown across the bonnet of a car during a hit and run. Are we compelled to hire a professional? Or simply wing it?

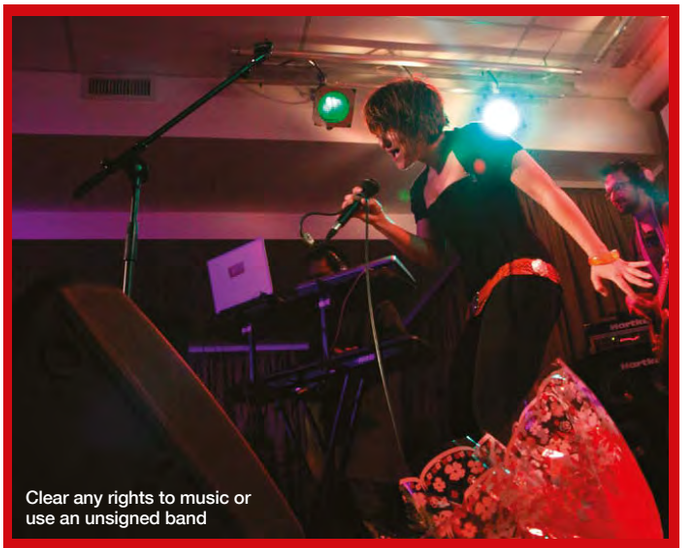
Susie, Ancoats

> You can hire a professional to clear the tracks you want and pay for them or you can find new, unsigned bands

JS: That's an area where I would recommend not winging it - you really do need to put your actors' safety above anything else and remember that you'll violate your insurance policy if you do something like this that hasn't been planned and overseen by a professional. Get yourself a copy of the Spotlight Stunt Register and try contacting some of the newer members who might be willing to work for a discount in order to get a stunt co-ordinator credit. If you really do want to shoot these scenes yourself, there are safe ways to do it, but you might have to make some creative compromises - intercut someone jumping towards a roof edge (with a safe landing spot, no sheer drops) with someone screaming ("nooooooooo") then cut to the body on the floor below, suitably battered and broken. For someone getting hit by a car, shoot the driver's reaction to the 'crash' with a suitable sound effect. It might not be what you had in mind, but it tells the story while cutting your cloth appropriately.

LOVE AND HATE

I love Digital FilmMaker magazine and it has inspired me to take my own filmmaking career further than the casual pastime it used to be, although I hate all the faffing around with movie history that my



Clear any rights to music or use an unsigned band

CHEAP THRILLS

I have written a film script that uses music for films set in night clubs as well as one or two characters singing karaoke versions of old hits. How would I go about getting permission for the use of this music and are there any cut-price/free options I should be considering?

Chris, Chelmsford

JS: There are two options here - you can hire a professional to clear the tracks you want and pay for them or you can find new, unsigned bands and use music that sounds a bit like what you wanted. Karaoke is harder of course, because realistically the machines only have well-known songs, but you are looking at anything from £5,000 to £100,000 to clear these tracks for use in your movie. If I was on a tight budget I'd rewrite the karaoke out of it, or set it in a karaoke bar that plays obscure music if you can get away with it (unlikely, I know!).





Join a film crew as a runner to gain experience

MEMORY LOSS

What's the best way of storing film footage if you're working with digital equipment? I know that sounds like a dumb question, it's just that you must deal with a lot of takes and all the rest of it, and to lose anything must surely be catastrophic. We aren't in the same league, but it would be good to get some pointers as to the most reliable media for digital filmmaking.
Angela, Ipswich

JS: Depending on the format you are shooting on, backing up all your data to three separate hard drives is generally a sensible and realistic option - let your DoP keep one drive, keep one yourself (safely!) and deliver the third to your editor or post-production house. Don't ever be tempted to wipe these drives, as you just never know when you might need the footage in the future! A standard LaCie 'Rugged' drive will suffice. www.lacie.com/uk



current university course seems very preoccupied with. I'm desperate to gain more practical experience. So what would you suggest as being the best way into the movies, aside from buying myself a cinema ticket. Can I volunteer my services on a film set? If that's the way forwards, where do I go and, more to the point, who do I ask to get started?
Neil, Cannock



JS: The best way to get practical experience is to apply for runners jobs - you'll get paid (it might only be NMW, but you won't be being exploited) and you'll learn about the realities of filmmaking. I know how frustrating theory can be, I walked out of A-Level Film Studies after just one term, but I now find myself constantly learning from film history (the basics of the film business haven't changed all that much in the last 50 years!). You'll find film companies looking for runners on Shooting People and similar sites and even Facebook. Just remember, work hard and be professional if you want to do well. One thing nobody needs is a runner who is more interested than adding the cast on Facebook than actually doing the job they are there to do and this type soon gets sussed out and moved on.

NICE SHOT

This magazine always seems to be carping on about getting plenty of behind-the-scenes shots. That has got me thinking, because I'm a keen photographer and wonder if there's a market for being a set snapper. Do you think there's a pro-level demand for this sort of thing or are low-budget filmmakers more likely to take a do-it-yourself approach?
Mark, Edinburgh

JS: One of the things I hear the most from distributors about independent producers is that they consistently fail to deliver enough decent stills alongside their films so the answer is definitely YES. However, you need to know what to shoot - star portraits, money shot scenes, glamorous shots of the leading ladies are all great. The gaffer pulling funny faces is a picture that is only wasting peoples' time. Distributors will expect between 100 and 1000 clear, practical images for a decent publicity campaign. You might not need to go to set every day to achieve this. For example, two-hander dialogue scenes in cafe's tend not to make for the most exciting stills. But, make sure that you don't waste a second when you are on set. Try and think of a dozen key images from the script that you can see as magazine covers and make sure you get them. Trying to reassemble cast for photo shoots is a pain. So yes, there is a real need for it and you'd be surprised how many producers (and not just inexperienced ones!) don't realise it, so get out there and pitch yourself! Finally, to any budding producers reading this, it doesn't matter how hi-res your screengrabs are, they still have that 'flat' look, which makes them depressingly obvious. You'll never get quality coverage out of them, so help yourself and spend an extra few quid on a photographer! It'll be money well spent.





BATTLE OF THE BULGE

We've been making our short film for what seems like aeons, so times and circumstances have changed. Not only that, our lead actor has ballooned in weight, which obviously has repercussions for continuity. Are we better off reshooting early scenes with him in his rather more rotund stance, or should we just fire him and start all over again? There's no contractual paperwork anyway, so do you think we are better off letting him head off in search of his next burger instead?
Ellie, Doncaster

JS: Actors and their weight are always a problem - the last thing anyone would want to see is, for example, some tubby guy waddling around in an action film shooting people because it just isn't believable. However, you should say to them (or, even better, their agent) that you'd like to use them but you're worried that they've put on weight. Give them a finite (but realistic) amount of time to get back in shape or say you'll have to recast. That way, you're being fair and practical.

MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

Although you mention actors buying roles in films for around 50k in a disapproving way, how would one get in touch with such artists for possible financing an indie film?
Anonymous, Hackney


Actors who buy parts do so for a reason

JS: Ha! They are more prevalent than you might think - the internet is full of them. I have even heard of particularly shady film producers selling parts via eBay auctions! Remember, however, you're not going to find amazing actors who need to bribe their way into parts. There was a fascinating article in The Guardian called Lights, Camera, Disaster in December 2009, which is available online. I'd really recommend reading it to see the realities and potential pitfalls of this kind of endeavor. If your project has a realistic chance of success, you will ultimately find backing through the proper channels.


Filming in public has its pitfalls

FARES PLEASE

What's the deal with filming on public transport? Me and a couple of mates want to shoot some footage for a short on-board a regular bus, but are there rules and regulations about this? Who would know if we just filmed anyway, guerilla fashion and left it at that. Or would you advise getting in touch via the correct channels?
Anonymous

JS: It never hurts to ask - head down to your local bus depot and ask if what you're going to film won't bother the other passengers - and if you can find a quiet bus rather than a busy, rush hour one - I think you might find they could play ball. If not, it isn't impossible to guerilla something like that, but again, pick a quiet bus out of the busy periods if you can. More importantly, try and find one with reasonably long gaps between stops if at all possible. ■

> **It doesn't matter how hi-res your screengrabs are they still have that 'flat' look, which makes them depressingly obvious**

WRITING A LOW BUDGET SCREEN PLAY PART TWO

In the second part of his essential guide to low or no-budget screenplays, Adam Manuel explores how to hone your work into tip-top shape…

So you've planned your story and are ready to begin writing. The good news is that the hardest part is over, and while the writing stage may take a long time, you're already well on your way to completing your screenplay. But where do you start? In order to get those first words on paper, you need to learn the industry standard formatting rules; how to write in the screenwriting style and, of course... how to stay on budget. This article, the second in the two-part series on how to write a low-budget screenplay is designed to guide you through both the writing and rewriting stages. I'll be providing excerpts and from my own feature screenplay, The Law of Large Numbers along with examples of how I put these ideas into practice directing my own low-budget short film, No More Silence.

Standard formatting

Conventions – 99% of a screenplay is made from four crucial elements - scene headings, action, character names and dialogue. If you haven't got any screenwriting software, now is the time to download it. Final Draft is the industry standard; however, you can download a free open-source program named Celtx (see our tutorial on page 78) if you don't have the money. Screenwriting software will automatically format the majority of your script for you and saves a great deal of time. Scene Headings - Every time a character changes location, or if there's a shift in time, a new scene heading is required. A scene heading is made up of three different components.

Scene Headings – Every time a character changes location or if there's a shift in time a new scene heading is required. A scene heading is made up of three different components.

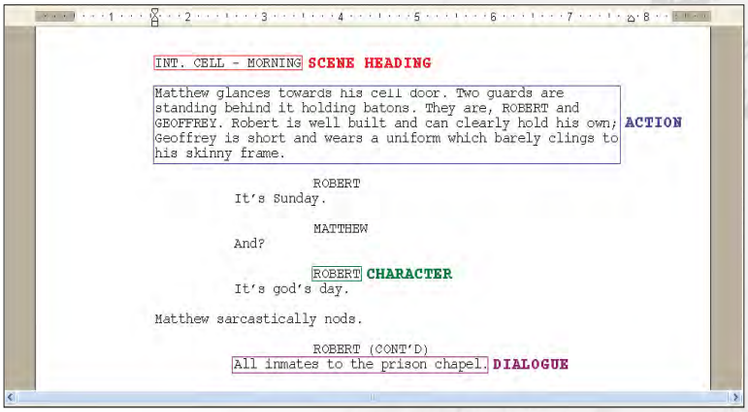
1. INT. or EXT. – the abbreviation for Interior and Exterior.

2. Location – where the scene is taking place.

3. Time – usually written as just DAY or NIGHT.



NO MORE SLENCE IMAGES BY ISABELL KIRSTIN, JOSEFINE ANDREASSON AND PATRIK NILSSON



Script formatting breakdown

The scene heading is written in CAPS. There should be a period after INT./EXT and a hyphen before you write the time.
Action – Description of what's happening on the screen. Action text can be used to describe settings and characters.

Elements that should be written in CAPS within action text include:
- Introducing a speaking character.
- On screen sounds
- Signs, banners and headlines

When you're writing action text never write character emotions. Everything that is written in your screenplay should be visual.
Character Names – Located above the dialogue in the centre of the page. Character names are always written in CAPS.
Dialogue – Always written beneath the character name. Unlike in a novel, when writing dialogue, never put quotation marks unless the character is quoting somebody else.

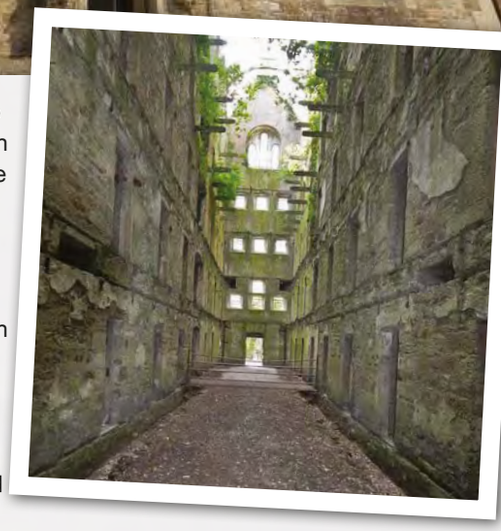
Other formatting rules

Transitions – These occur between scene changes. They include cuts, dissolves, fades and wipes. Transitions are always situated 0.6" on the right of the page and are written in CAPS. Most screenplays will start with FADE IN: and finish with FADE OUT. However, other alternatives can be used, such as: FADE TO BLACK. and FADE TO WHITE. The last transition that is used in a script should contain a period rather than a colon.

Parentheticals – Descriptions that are used within dialogue to describe what a character is doing while they are talking. Parentheticals are always written in lower case on a separate line.

Voice Over – Used when a character is talking from an unknown location, such as inside their head. Voice overs are written as the abbreviation (V.O.) after the character name.


Location shots of Bodmin Jail for The Law of Large Numbers



Off Screen – Used when a character in the scene is talking, but we don't see them. It is always written as the abbreviation (O.S.) after the character name.

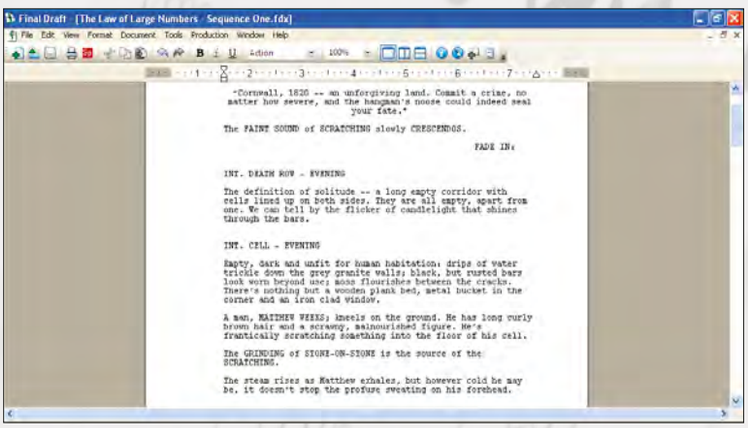
Camera Directions – As a writer it can be very tempting to place camera directions in your screenplay. However, they should always be avoided, unless it is absolutely essential to the plot. Always write them on a new line in CAPS. The shot should be specified at the beginning with a hyphen and then the subject of the shot written afterwards. Camera direction includes: POV shots, close-ups, extreme close-ups, tracking shots, underwater shots and so on.

The screenwriting style

Stray from long passages of descriptive language and write only what's necessary to get your message across. Write setting descriptions, character descriptions and what's happening on screen in the action text in a short and concise manner. A small paragraph describing each element of your location and characters will suffice. Don't direct the director or actors. Putting too much detail in your script is often insulting to their profession. Engaging dialogue is one of the most important aspects of writing a low-budget film with limited locations. Quentin Tarantino's

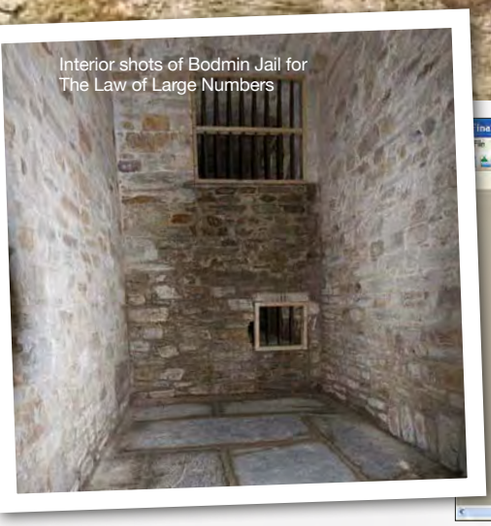


Actor Linus Ljunggren getting ready

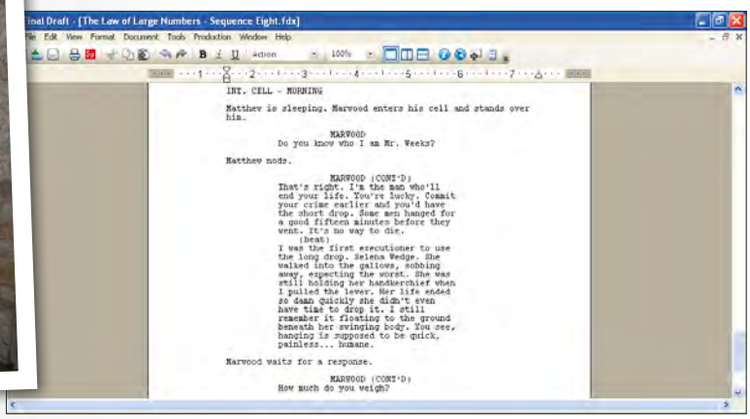


The Law of Large Numbers - Opening Scene





Interior shots of Bodmin Jail for The Law of Large Numbers



The Law of Large Numbers - Final Scene

Reservoir Dogs is the perfect example. The first 11 minutes is just a conversation between a group of criminals in a café, but the dialogue is so witty that it keeps the viewer completely absorbed in the story. In The Law of Large Numbers, I used long passages of dialogue to drive the plot. This may defy standard screenwriting conventions of going straight in and out of the action. However, when you're writing a low-budget script there's a little more leeway.

The budget mindset

I can't stress enough the importance of remaining in the budget mindset when you're writing. Even when you've come up with a story that has minimal actors, locations and production values, it's easy to go astray. Remember to keep referencing your story outline documents. If part of your story takes place in a location that you never planned on using, find a way to rewrite it into what you already have. In The Law of Large Numbers the protagonist, Matthew Weeks has committed a murder, but do you see the murder? No. As the story progresses the details behind the murder are exposed, but never on screen. Use sound wisely. In the original draft of The Law of Large Numbers, the final scene was an exterior shot of the gallows with hundreds of angry patrons gathered around to see him hanged. I knew from the beginning that this scene wasn't going to make the final cut, although I didn't know how to get the message across. During the rewrite, I changed the scene to Matthew waiting in his prison cell with nothing but the sound of the angry crowd for company. It's much cheaper to overdub sound into a film than it would be to hire hundreds of extras, dress them in period costumes and build a new exterior set.

It's all about the rewrite!

It's very rare that a screenplay will get sold or move into production stages on the first draft. Most screenwriters will completely rewrite their screenplay multiple times before they even consider sending it out to directors, producers or agents. When you write your script, it can be hard to find a cut-off point. They say



Director Adam Manuel filming



in filmmaking that you never finish a film, you just give up! Well, the same principle applies to screenwriting. It would be impossible to say, "You must do x-amount of rewrites" because the truth is, it can vary significantly. My short film, No More Silence, is only 7 pages long. However, I rewrote the script 10 times over the course of six months before my team moved into production and, even when we were filming, I was constantly making minor adjustments. Many of the rewrites consisted around lowering the budget. For example, when we started filming we had a limited supply of lighting and time. This led me to rewrite the final scene hours before we shot it. What was originally day changed to night, because we were behind schedule and had to work into the early hours with no daylight. At one point we even had to use an iPhone to add a little extra light to our lead actor's face!

Before you start the rewriting stage, put your script away for at least a week. During this time, pretend it doesn't exist - don't think about your story, characters, deadlines and all the rest of it, just completely ignore it. This will allow you to reread it with a fresh outlook. You'll spot things you love and hate, and will come up with new ideas to improve the world you've built and finalise your plot. Make notes and then rewrite your entire script with these new elements in mind. Rinse and repeat this process until you think it's ready. If you feel overwhelmed by the workload, focus on a particular element of the script individually during each rewrite. For example, when I rewrote No More Silence, I focused one entire rewrite on improving action text; and then another on strengthening the dialogue and so on.

30 DAY CHECKLIST

Day 1 Write your opening scene.

Day 2-9 Write one sequence per day.

Day 10 Write your final scene.

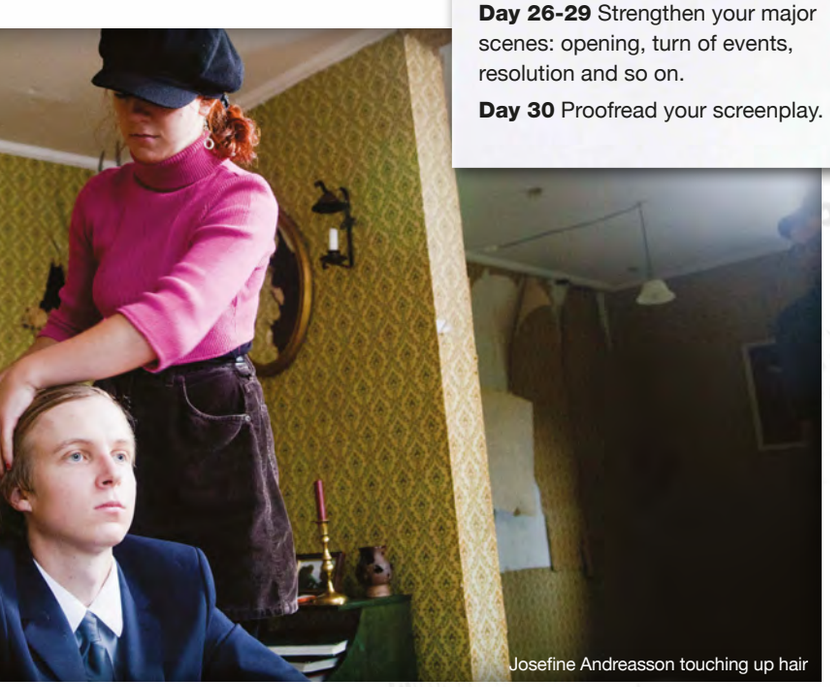
Day 10-17 Rest.

Day 18 Re-read your screenplay and take notes.

Day 19-25 Rewrite one sequence per day.

Day 26-29 Strengthen your major scenes: opening, turn of events, resolution and so on.

Day 30 Proofread your screenplay.



Josefine Andreasson touching up hair

Practice makes perfect

Rewriting can also help you finalise your plot and structure. When I was writing The Law of Large Numbers I came across many loose ends, but I only realised how to tie them up after reading my first draft. For example, I initially came up with a twist ending; the protagonist Matthew Weeks is trying to escape jail using probability theory whilst the antagonist is trying to escape using prayer. I knew that I wanted the antagonist to survive, I just didn't know how. In the original draft, he turns out to be a psychologist pretending to be a priest. He manages to persuade Matthew to turn to religion and confess his crimes. But why would he do that? During the rewrite I realised that the body of his wife was never found (another loose end). I incorporated



Patrik Nilsson marking the slate


Some camera trickery

this element into the antagonist's motive. He's trying to persuade Matthew to confess his crime, so he'll reveal the location of her body - then her family can have closure and have a proper burial. Use the rewrite stages of your own script to iron out the details in your ending and ensure your characters have motives for their goals - even if you have to rewrite some of the earlier parts of your story.

Marketing & promotion

Marketing your script is an altogether different art form. When you've completed your screenplay, fine-tune your logline. This is arguably the most important element of the marketing process. Your logline is the first piece of writing that directors, producers and agents will read and will often determine whether they'll request your script. Keep your logline as short and concise as possible. One to two sentences is plenty. Make sure it sums up the theme and story, without giving too much away. The logline for The Law of Large Numbers is:

"Two men are on death row; a man of science and a man of god. They both believe they've found the key to freedom, but in very different ways... One of them will survive."

You should prepare a synopsis and treatment. These documents could be requested by industry





Cinematographer Joen Bergenrud

A FINAL NOTE

Although I don't have any intentions of becoming a director, writing and directing No More Silence taught me a lot about how to write on a budget; and how to work a script around issues on set. Producing your own work is certainly a great way to understand how budgeting works and how to incorporate it into your own screenwriting.

If you would like to request a copy of my low-budget screenplay, The Law of Large Numbers, feel free to email me at: enquiries@adammanuel.com. For more information on my screenplays and produced work, visit:

whitespacefilmproductions.com
forteanafilms.com
adammanuel.com

Make sure that your script is registered with the WGA or a Script Vault to protect yourself from screenplay theft

professionals if they are interested in your logline. They can also help directors, producers and agents decide whether to read your screenplay. Treat the synopsis like it's an extended version of your logline and keep it between one and two paragraphs. The synopsis should cover the plot, characters and motives, again, in a short and concise manner. The synopsis for The Law of Large Numbers is:

It's 1850 and two men are on death row; a man of science and a man of god.

The man of science has been found guilty of murdering his wife; however, her body was never found and he's always maintained his innocence. He believes that probability theory is the key to freedom. He spends his days scratching mathematical formulas onto the walls of his cell, trying to figure out the best possible time to escape.

The man of god has been found guilty of murdering a young boy. Although he has confessed his crimes, he too doesn't want to die. He believes that prayer is the key to escape. He spends his days pleading for forgiveness, begging for a higher power to set him free.

The treatment is simply an extended synopsis; however, it will cover your story in its entirety. Treatments should include everything that's necessary to get the details of your screenplay across to the reader. I usually tend to keep my treatments between one and two pages although it's not uncommon for them to be up to ten pages. Split your treatment into sections. Start with the synopsis and then cover the major plot points of each act under a separate heading.

Start marketing your script only when you've written your selling documents. The Internet is without a doubt the most powerful networking tool for screenwriters. Almost every agent or production company will have submission guidelines on their website and will specify whether they are actively searching for new screenplays. Choose your submissions wisely. Research the agencies or production companies before you submit anything. There's no point in sending over a horror script to a company that only produces comedy. Also, before you send anything to anyone, make sure that your script is registered with either the WGA (USA) or a Script Vault (UK) to protect yourself from screenplay theft.

Websites such as InkTip can also help you break into the business. InkTip is a service for both screenwriters and industry professionals. The concept is simple - you upload your logline to a directory and the directory is sent to industry professionals - then the industry professionals request scripts that sound the most appealing. ■

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

Professional filmmaker Tom Paton challenges himself to produce a top-quality product with little more than a few pounds in small change and a relatively spartan kit list...

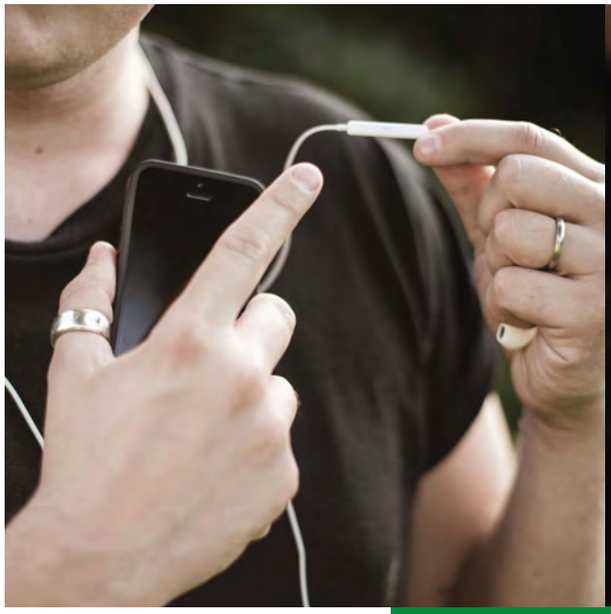
Any of the people who have ever worked with me, or perhaps even listened to a slightly drunken rant over a few beers, will happily tell you that I am pretty opinionated when it comes to filmmaking. In my eyes, 21st century filmmaking is a completely different industry to that of the previous hundred years. The game is changing so rapidly that it requires each and every one of us to retrain weekly and step outside of our comfort zones. Technology has become so accessible and so versatile that every single person has the opportunity to flex their creative muscles if they choose to.

No longer does a client book you for the equipment you use, but instead they book you for what you are capable of creatively. I won't pretend that this opinion of mine isn't a dangerous one, these



changing times will force a lot of long-standing industry professionals to do something they have never had to do before…they will have to prove they are as good as their expensive equipment used to suggest they were. The clients have become tech savvy, they know that size means nothing in this new era of cameras and they are also aware that, just because someone has brought an Arri Alexa to set with them, it doesn't guarantee a quality product.



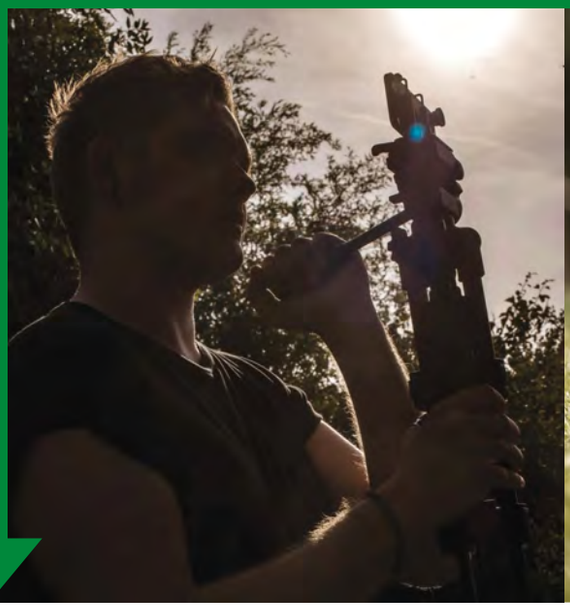




Search the house for your film budget

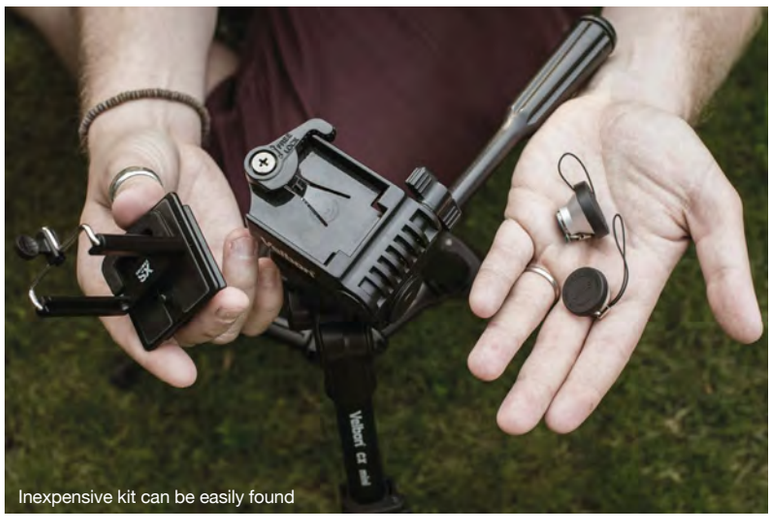
Is it possible?

One evening though, I thought to myself "Well it's all fine and good to have an opinion, but how far can it get you in practice?" Hmm, it's actually a very poignant question, and even if you don't agree with my perspective, it is still a curious proposition. In the year of 2013AD, just how low can you actually go in terms of budget and equipment and still pull off something that could be classed as professional looking? After deciding to investigate, I have found out that the answer is you can go pretty damn low, if you know what you're doing.





I set myself a simple challenge to test the limits of my theories on filmmaking. First of all, I had to act as if I owned none of the required camera equipment that would usually be considered essential to film something professionally. Secondly, I had to decide on an acceptable way to drum up a budget from absolutely nowhere and, finally, I had to decide on what exactly I was going to film that could really push the experiment. Whatever it was would need to be gradable and I would also need to find a way to do nice, clear, professional sounding audio. What followed was an interesting and fun learning curve that I would encourage even the most seasoned filmmaker to have a go at.



Inexpensive kit can be easily found

Minimal budget

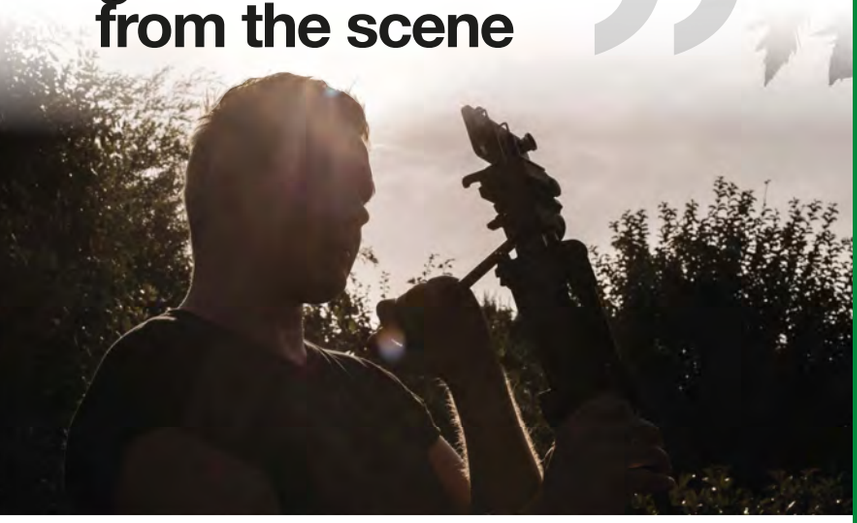
I decided that the first thing I should figure out was the budget to be spent. We all have loose change lying around our homes, whether it's down the back of the sofa or collecting dust in a drawer at your desk. For the budget then, I quite literally scraped the barrel of my flat for whatever spare change I could collect. In the end, I reached an admirable £27.53, all in copper shrapnel, which I promptly put into my bank. If you're planning on playing along at home then you'll soon find out that the hunt for pennies is an entertaining afternoon in itself.

What kind of kit?

Next up, was the question of where to get my hands on a camera that could film at a professional bit rate, shoot at 25fps (24fps if you are in the US) and that would suit the tone of the challenge. Sure, I could bash out a Facebook status asking if someone would lend me a Canon 5D MKIII for the day, but that would defeat the point of this little exercise. Instead, I opted for the very thing we all have in our back pockets. Smartphones have come on in leaps and bounds in the past decade, especially when you consider that just ten years ago I was going crazy for Snake II on my trusty Nokia 3210.

I now own an iPhone 5 and the camera specifications are impressive considering its size. The iPhone has some fundamental

I purchased a cheap £8.99 microphone. This was to capture the general ambient noise from the scene

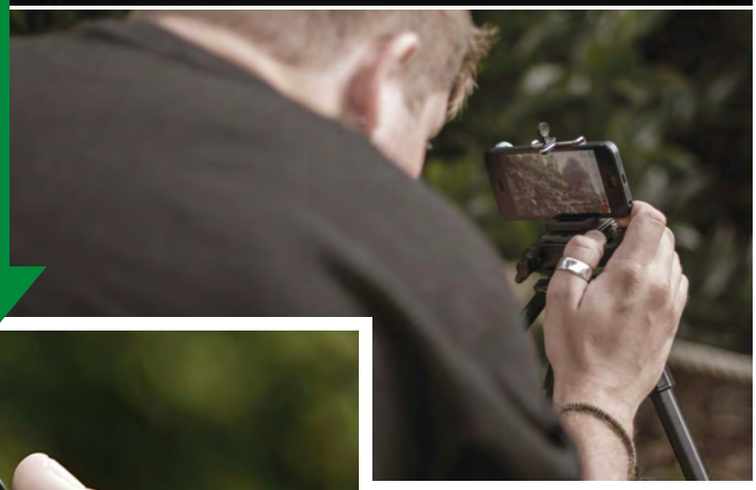


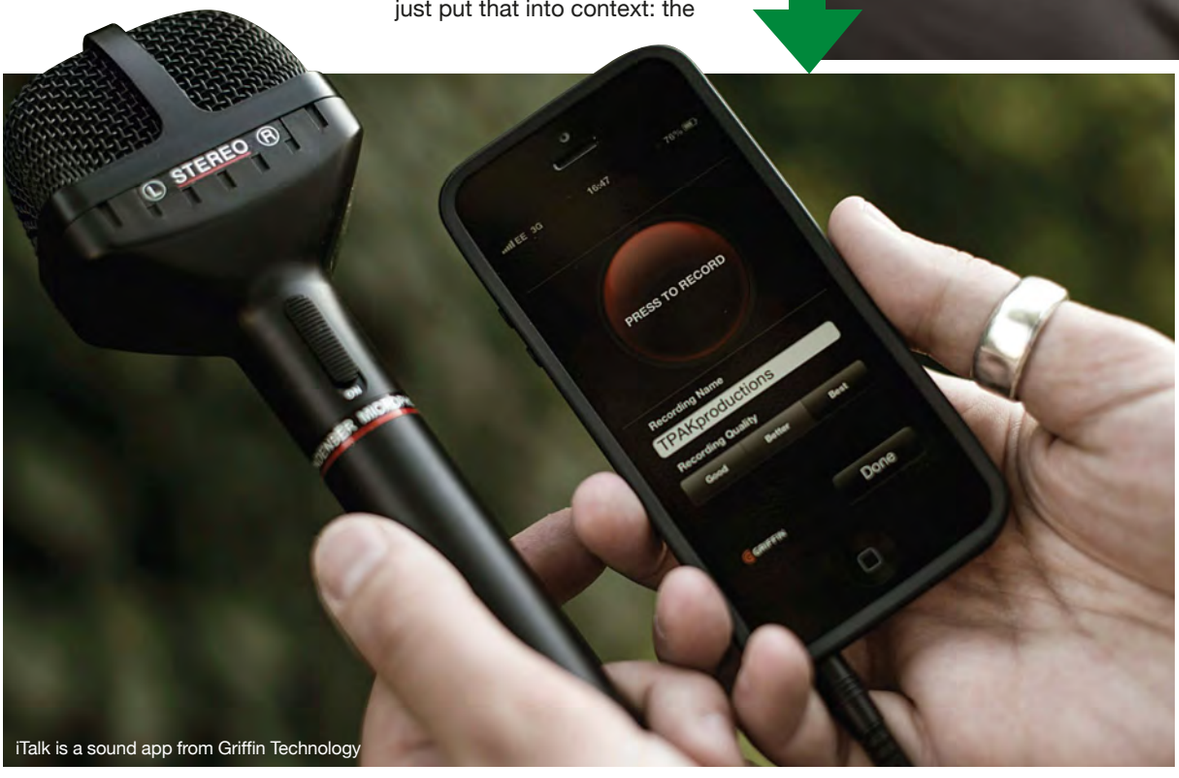
problems that keep it from looking professional however; it films in the rather ugly, video quality of 30fps and the bitrate is a tiny 16mbps. So, at first glance, it doesn't bode well to use a phone for a professional-looking film piece. But, these issues are completely fixable and all it will cost your budget is a tiny £2.49. FiLMiC Pro is a video camera app that beat the £4,600 Sony FS100 and tied with the £12,000 Canon C300 in a blind audience test called 'Zacuto: Revenge of the Great Camera Shoot Out', which you can check out online for further proof of the rapidly shrinking gap between the high and low-end camera market.

The app turns your average camera phone into a beast of a film camera. It allows you to choose from a variety of frame rates, gives you complete control over focusing, exposure and white balance as well as letting you whack the bitrate up to a mighty, broadcast-worthy 50mbps. Let's just put that into context: the



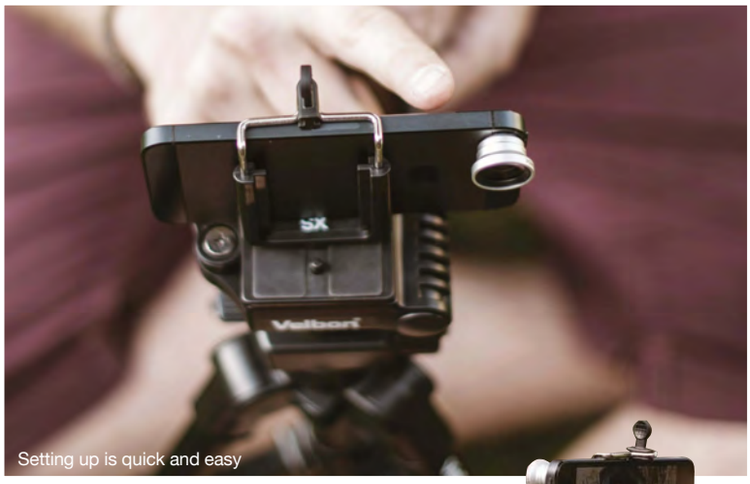






iTalk is a sound app from Griffin Technology

Nikon D800 is a fantastic full-frame film camera costing around a cool £2,000, but it can only record up to 28mbps, thereby requiring you to use an external recorder if you want to reach the bitrates needed for broadcast TV. The app doesn't make your phone a dream device and you will certainly need to fill your scene with light to avoid heavy noise. But for £2.49 you could shoot a documentary in broad daylight that's subsequently easy to grade and will also meet the standards needed for television. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.


Setting up is quick and easy



Sound quality

The other major challenge of making a film on a budget of £27.53 is audio. There is a reason that The Blair Witch Project was one of Hollywood's biggest earners, despite the fact that the footage quality isn't great. An audience will accept any image as long as the audio sounds professional; it's the key to separating your production from something the audience will associate with being amateurish. But, how do you overcome such a massive hurdle without money for a sound guy and a boom mic? Well, you simply use another smartphone, or several if you have to. Everyone has one these days, and if you are making your film with more than one person (as you should be, because I also believe that films are better when they are collaborative), then you are going to have at least four or five phones on your set. There are a huge amount of apps for sound recording and some of them have a wealth of useful features to enhance audio.

But what I'm really trying to find out is just how little money I can actually spend and still get away with it. With that in mind, I decided to use a free app called iTalk from Griffin Technology (it also has a Pro version for just £1.49), which I installed onto my wife's iPhone 4s. The app is very straightforward and features a big red record button at the top of the screen and the ability to title each audio clip and save it below. The audio is easy to transfer to your laptop, either through iTunes or by simply emailing it to yourself via your phone. The app records audio at 44.1kHz and saves files in an AIFF format.



The right levels

Now that we have the audio recording device sorted, we're going to need a way of mic'ing each of the actors up so that we get nice, clear audio that doesn't feel as if it was recorded at a distance. Again, I looked for the cheapest possible option and decided to use the hands-free earphones that come with the phone itself. They feature a small lapel microphone that is intended for making phone calls without having the headset near your ear. But you can also use them as a makeshift radio mic. Run the wire from the earphones under your actors clothes and simply drape them across the neck under the shirt line, making sure you position the mic at lapel height around the front. Then plug them into

The phone produced suprisingly decent footage

the phone and hit record on your sound app, placing the phone into the actors back pocket.

Do this to each of your actors using each of their phones and you have an effective way of capturing clear audio from every one of your characters. Naturally, if you can get your hands on a nice tie-clip microphone you should opt for this instead. The next thing I did required a trip to a cheap electronic store where I purchased a budget £8.99 microphone. This I used to capture the general ambient noise from the scene. Now, you could simply place your phone down, but by adding the mic it allows you to capture directional sound from the scene you are working in. Is it perfect? Absolutely not, what I wouldn't have given for a high-end Rode mic. But it does do the job nicely and goes some way to proving the point that inventiveness and creativity will trump expensive equipment in the years to come. Just remember to get one of your actors to clap loudly before you call action so that you have a point to sync the audio to the footage in post-production.



Bargain basement

So what to do with my remaining £16.05? I hit the online shopping emporium known as Amazon to see what kit I could afford to spruce up my iPhone. I found a small but rugged tripod and a mount for my phone, all for a very reasonable £8. I then found a set of two lenses that attached to the back of my phone to give me a wider view. There are a variety of these types of lenses that all differ in terms of quality, but I only had £8.05 left, so I opted for a wide-angle and fisheye combination costing just £5.35 including postage. What a bargain! One week later and I had all the kit I needed to prove that technology is levelling the playing field.

Pick a topic

The final part of the puzzle was what to film? With a kit of this size the options were endless, but with the original goal of making



something filmic in mind, I decided to make a short film. There is an old phrase in the book world, which is 'Write what you know'. Well, us modern filmmakers could co-opt this saying into 'Write what you know you can get for free'. I checked in my wardrobe for potential costumes to give me some inspiration for a script. I found an old army-style jacket that I've had for some years and decided it would lend itself well to a post-apocalyptic short film.

That way, I could use my knowledge of After Effects and colour grading to pull off something truly cinematic (there are hundreds of free tutorials online on websites such as www.videocopilot.com for you to start sinking your teeth into). My script would feature a heavy



Grab your smartphone and a few like-minded people and see what you can do



voiceover (to convincingly test the audio) and be shot in a local nature reserve near to my house, which hardly anyone ever visits. It doesn't get much cheaper than a free location. I roped in a good friend of mine to act in the piece and shot it all in broad daylight to avoid any lighting costs.

Beating the odds

It was certainly an interesting project to undertake, and one worth sharing with the readers of this fine magazine. I've long thought that the filmmaking world is about to share a lot in common with the art world. A comic book artist isn't hired because he has the best set of pencils in town; he is hired because he has a unique perspective on the world, which he is able to commit effectively to paper, regardless of how much his HB pencil cost. Filmmaking is now entering that same realm, where once we needed hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of equipment to even get going, now we need nothing more than a group of people all packing a smartphone.

It's not perfect and there are a lot of drawbacks, but it's a way to get your foot through the door like never before. Suddenly, all you need is a good idea, a solid vision and some willing participants. So, start digging around your home for loose change for your own low-budget film. Grab your smartphone and a few like-minded people and see what you can do. My little film, titled The End of Boredom, which is a short, dark comedy, will be posted onto the Digital FilmMaker Magazine Facebook page where I hope to see a few of your own attempts. The only thing holding you back these days is yourself because, if truth were told, you can go pretty low these days in terms of overall budget. ■

For more information on Tom Paton and to read his blog visit: www.tpakproductions.com Or follow him on Twitter @TPAKproductions



SHOOTING RAW ON A DSLR

Writer and director Christian Evans discusses shooting his latest short film with cinematographer Nick Clarke in hacked Raw on a Canon 5D MKII

How many endeavouring filmmakers have flicked through the pages of Digital FilmMaker Magazine and seen others of their ilk shooting on a RED Epic or an Arri Alexa and thought 'No fair, I want to play with that'? We then make an unflinching oath to ourselves that we'll shoot our next film on a camera like that (or better). I should know because that was exactly the attitude I had after I'd penned my latest short film Ochus Bochus - a 20-minute dark comedy thriller.

I took my script and vision to a man more technically-minded than myself; my Director of Photography, Nick Clarke and explained my intentions. I knew he'd had some experience shooting on a RED before and I knew that, being a 'techie', he got genuinely excited by working with high-end cameras, so I expected him to jump at the chance. The response however was fairly muted. Instead of getting excited, he cast a reflective glance and said 'Have you considered shooting it in Raw?'









Shooting in Raw opens up a wealth of new possibilities

WHAT IS MAGIC LANTERN?

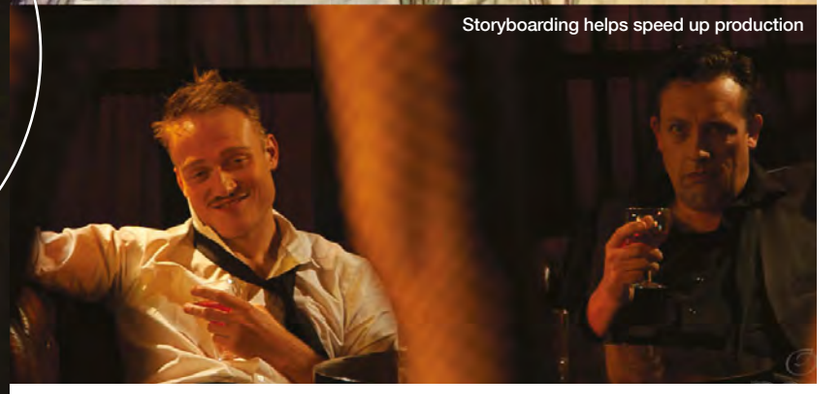
Magic Lantern is a free software add-on for Canon DSLR's. It offers several handy features for filmmakers not built in to Canon's firmware, such as focus peaking, zebra lines, crop marks and most recently, Raw video shooting. Check out the Magic Lantern webpage for details at www.magiclantern.fm

Of course, I hadn't. Truth be told, I didn't really know what Raw was. But, after an in-depth discussion, Nick filled me in on the technological leaps and bounds which the Magic Lantern team had made by hacking Canon DSLR's to shoot in the Raw format. This ability until now has been fairly restricted to the more exclusive Blackmagic Cinema Cameras. If you're a photographer, you'll be no stranger to the Raw format, which is most commonly associated with lossless quality, dynamic image manipulation and massive file sizes. Shooting video files on Raw is no exception.

From there, myself and other key crew members discussed the feasibility of shooting in Raw. On the plus side, outside of test shots that people had uploaded - which looked rather nice - nobody had yet shot a proper film in that format. So it remained to be seen what potential could be unlocked. Another pro for shooting Raw over RED was that we could quite easily film on a Canon 5D MKII, which we had available to us, as opposed to hiring out a RED that would've been expensive. This would allow us to utilise our lowly budget in other ways - and as this project was being shot with a particular 'Post-Victorian' aesthetic - there would certainly need to be money spent with regards to costume and certain locations.

The option to shoot Raw didn't come without some cons however. Firstly, the Magic Lantern software, which allowed us to shoot this format, was still in its infancy and, for lack of a better description, fairly unstable. This meant my DoP Nick would have to do some extensive testing first to find out whether it was stable enough to shoot on. Afterall, shooting a couple minutes worth of alluring scenery shots as a test video is a

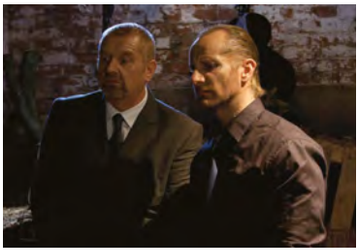




Storyboarding helps speed up production

> **There was no doubt that RAW offered up so much more clarity, colour and depth than its counterpart**

completely different ballgame to shooting a 20 minute narrative film, where every second of the shot counts. We didn't want to risk going through pre-production and shooting in a format that resulted in footage that was glitchy and dropped frames in the edit. In fact, just the thought of that happening was the stuff of nightmares for me throughout the shoot. Another factor worth mentioning is that you need to invest in certain equipment before you have the capability to shoot Raw - in this case, a 32GB SanDisk Extreme Pro 90MB/s Compact Flash card. These are fairly specialist and require some



shopping around. While you'll have no problems finding them online, you'll be hard pushed to find a Maplins that has them permanently in stock. So plan and kit yourself out accordingly should you decide to try Raw shooting for yourself.



Production

Once the correct platform had been tested and we'd settled on a resolution that we believed would deliver unrivalled quality, but also be stable enough, I made the decision to shoot the entire film in the Raw format. This still posed a risk however. Although shooting in relative 720p and up-scaling to 1080p seemed stable and allowed continuous recording, there was no guarantee that we wouldn't encounter frame drops or unexplained bugs in the final recording.

In an effort to negate these complications, I had my editor on set to undergo DIT duties. This meant we could start rolling and do a couple of takes before getting the card to the DIT, who would then upload the footage onto the Mac and convert it to a format we could watch back



Raw footage will produce larger but much better quality files







Ungraded h.264 footage



Ungraded Raw footage



The team takes a break

and check for any issues. This was handy and offered reassurance, but was also time consuming; waiting for 32GB of footage to transfer across is a pretty big time constraint on set. As a back up, we also decided that while we waited to hear back from the editor, we'd film the same shots again, but this time in the DSLR standard h.264 format as a back up. Again, this is a great idea in theory, but when you're on a tight schedule, trying to make the most of a night shoot in the middle of July, it's yet another time drainer. Subsequently, after reviewing the first night's footage and falling behind on schedule, I made the uneasy decision to scrap shooting in h.264 on future shots. This was a big risk, but the Raw footage we'd shot appeared to have captured just fine with no issues. So, in an effort to get back on schedule, I made that call and hoped it would pay off with no negative consequences.



The footage we shot in h.264 was not wasted, however. Shooting the main scene in both Raw and h.264 meant we could compare the formats and see the difference. And, from looking at the rushes, there was no doubt that Raw offered up so much more clarity, colour and depth than its counterpart.

The post-process

Navigating Raw's convoluted post-process and workflow is perhaps one of the biggest headaches about shooting in

TESTING HACKED RAW

by Nick Clarke

As a self-taught aspiring DoP, I started out by learning to shoot on DSLR. I then slowly started to use bigger and better cameras and rigs, and have now shot on a wide array of different formats. Most articles from those in the industry talk about the comparative inflexibility of DSLR footage in comparison to other formats. Rather than forsake my trusty DSLR however, I decided to push this low level format as far as possible by learning how to get things right in-camera, such as lighting and colour, because of how 'inflexible' the footage would be in post.

Having two Canon DSLR's of my own, I had already worked a lot with Magic Lantern firmware. So, needless to say, when I first heard about Magic Lantern hacking DSLR's to shoot Raw, I was beyond excited. The format on which I had started out had now been given more potential flexibility than RED footage. At least with regards to colour, dynamic range and the sheer amount of data the image holds.

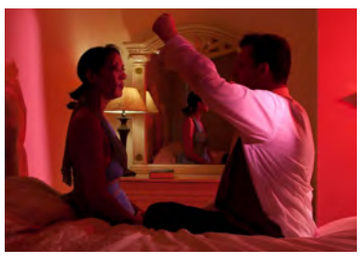
I started out by testing the 5D MKII. I took a 133x speed CF card and installed Magic Lantern. After a bit of faffing and figuring out the menu systems, I went outside to do a test shoot, where I soon hit the first problem. I could only record up to 3 seconds of footage at a time! It was pretty obvious by that point that the card was way too slow, so I invested in an 800x speed one to continue the testing. The results suggested that the lower the max resolution, the more stable and continuous shooting the footage would become. So at this point, it was about finding the optimum resolution, which would allow for the highest quality.



After tweaking some settings, we tested the camera out by shooting 1280x536, giving us a 2.39:1 aspect ratio. Conveniently, this was the aspect ratio that Christian had already decided the film would be shot in. I knew this resolution at 720p could be up-scaled effectively to 1080p using Raw, and I knew I was well within the limits of continuous recording while the risk of frame drops were dramatically reduced. So, we test shot in that resolution and up-scaled.

The film crew at work

the format. In order to actually watch it back on the Mac, you need to move the Raw files



across and then convert those into CinemaDNG files using RawMagic - which can then be imported into Adobe After Effects (It's important to note that unless you have a specific plug-in, you will not be able to open DNG files in Premiere Pro to edit them).

Once you open the DNG files in After Effects, you'll be given the opportunity to edit the Raw file, in the same way you would if you open a Raw photograph in Photoshop. From here, you can adjust the exposure, hue, tint and so on. This serves as a preliminary grade - you can adjust the colour correction here too so that it's easier for you to grade and colour later on.

From there, you can render and export the files as Lossless .MOV files, which you can import into Premiere Pro and then edit. Again, this is time consuming and also demands a lot of hard drive space. Just to give you an idea of how much, during this prolonged conversion process my Mac







The Pros

The results were simply outstanding. The amount of colour detail was unbelievable and the footage is so flexible you can do almost anything with it. The noise reduction on import to After Effects works tremendously, so there's no need to worry about noise in higher ISO's. Although we shot Ochus Bochus in relative 720p and then up-scaled, the resulting image seems far sharper and generally better quality than 1080p footage.

The Cons

As many digital filmmakers may already know from their own experiences, moiré and aliasing can be a major issue when shooting on DSLR. And unfortunately, shooting Raw has been reported to increase this. Christian and I tried to counter this in production by avoiding costumes and set design that would play havoc with the camera. And, as yet, we have not noticed any major issues with the footage.

went from having 2TB of space to 800GB. And we'd only filmed half of the film!

What next?

Shooting Ochus Bochus in Raw was certainly far from simple and easy. During production, it almost immediately put us behind schedule. Despite making some big decisions on the set to try and allay that, the schedule never quite recovered and it soon became apparent that this was going to take a bit more time and perseverance than originally anticipated. But thankfully, the sheer quality and production value of shooting Raw and seeing the potential it offers has meant that myself and the team are more than committed to ensuring we don't compromise on the quality or detract from the original vision. As a result, we have made the decision to shoot the second half of Ochus Bochus towards the end of the year. And, in the meantime, we are running a crowdfunding campaign in an attenpt to help us fund it.



It's still too early to say just how far Raw will go - but if this film is anything to go by, I honestly believe that there is an awful lot of potential. I originally wanted to shoot this film on a RED, but in hindsight I am glad that I tried something new and different that provided results to rival that high-end kit. Who knows, maybe in time, shooting Raw will provide a feasible, cost-effective alternative to shooting 4K? ■



Shooting in Raw requires plenty of storage space

LIVING THE DREAM

Q&A

Rhys Hayward is a filmmaker who has recently produced and directed a stylish UK thriller called Heavy Duty

Can you tell us about your filmmaking background prior to Heavy Duty?

Like many filmmakers, I initially began making short films using my friends and family as actors. I did this using an old Sony video 8 camera - needless to say, I'm very envious of younger filmmakers having so much cool technology available. Times have certainly changed! I then got to work in London as a runner for a number of companies, including Working Title and so I was able to experience first hand how these companies are run to a degree.

However, I was very eager to pursue my dream of directing and continued to make my own films, with the budgets gradually increasing as I gained more experience and expertise. I wasn't making any money by making short films and so I soon switched over to music videos and that led to work being broadcast on Sky TV. I'd always wanted to be making feature films, but until the more affordable digital technology came along the expensive film cameras and processing costs were always huge obstacles.

Did you start out as a producer and director or has it just panned out that way?

I've produced all my own music videos and short films, mainly out of necessity, although if I had had a choice I would've stuck to directing. It's far better to concentrate on the one job if you can. Having said that, guys like Kubrick became producers in order to retain greater control of their work. I guess you have to go with what works best for you - there's no point spreading yourself too thin if you can help it.

Tell us about Heavy Duty, what inspired it?

No particular single event inspired it in terms of the story. I was told I'd have to get a feature under my belt, otherwise it would be fairly hard to get financing for Grace and Danger with me as director. I had to come up with a story fairly quickly as the actors I wanted were only available for a limited time period. I wanted to tell a simple story, to have,



say, one main location and have most of the action take place there - purely for budgetary reasons! So, I wrote the story around what I'd have, or could possibly have, at my disposal, which ended up being a forest. I'd seen a few thrillers, such as Cronenberg's Eastern Promises, which involved eastern European criminals and I decided to write a story where similar shady characters pick a fight with the wrong guy and soon realise that they've met their match.

What's the general story about?

A former soldier suffering from PTSD who goes on holiday with his wife to a secluded spot in the country. Their holiday break is shattered when they witness some eastern European thugs killing a gang member in broad daylight. As they flee the scene, they run into another henchman and look set to become the gang's next victims. The rest of the film involves a cat-and-mouse scenario with the hero picking off the gang members one by one.

How does it differ from other thrillers?

I don't know that it's wildly different from other thrillers - I think most thrillers follow similar genre patterns. And, with so many films being made, it's getting increasingly difficult to be entirely original. The film has been praised for its cinematography and I think the interesting thing is the different journeys within the story; you have the physical journeys of each character and also the internal journey of the soldier, which is assisted by the use of flashbacks and voiceovers.

> **"I used mostly Canon lenses and a few Nikon primes and a good collection of Transcend CF cards"**





Filming took place on location

Who has been involved on the acting front?

Giles Alderson plays the lead (Paul). He'd sent me a pre-release version of The Torment and I thought the brooding character he played in that wasn't too far removed from the character of Paul. Tim J. Henley, an actor who'd starred alongside Giles in The Harsh Light of Day played a villain in the start of the film.





Jay Simon (from The Wedding Date) played Gregorin, the main villain of the piece and Sebastian Street came in and did a cameo in the film - it turned out he was friends with Giles, so that was a nice twist, although they had to fight each other to the death in one scene. I think they're still on speaking terms! Dan Cade, another of the good guys, has gone on to star in Luc Besson's The Family and has also had a big part in the Metal Hurlant Chronicles. Simon DeSilva has since worked on Skyfall and Jack Ryan. Lucas Hansen was in The Human Centipede II and will next be seen in Soldiers of the Damned.

What about the crew who helped out?

Essentially, the production crew was myself on camera, a sound recordist and a runner. A very minimalistic approach - not ideal, but we got the job done. Of course, Gareth Edwards had a similar scenario on his film Monsters, although Heavy Duty has a much bigger cast (20+ actors). The more crew you have, the more mouths you'll need to feed during the production, and on a low-budget indie movie you find yourself constantly counting the pennies. Travelling expenses can also break the bank if you're not careful. In the end, all the actors rallied around and helped wherever possible. It's quite difficult to make an indie film work without that kind of team spirit.



What kind of kit set-up did you use?

In the past, I'd used a Canon XH-A1 with a Letus adaptor. Of course, the added weight makes it quite unwieldy - or at least that was my experience. When I was planning to shoot Heavy Duty, I knew we'd be carting the gear through woodland areas and I was



concerned how my back would hold out (I've suffered a slipped-disc in the past). I built my own shoulder rig on which I mounted a Canon 5D MKII with a separate monitor - it would've been very difficult to accurately judge focus without the monitor. I used mostly Canon lenses and a few Nikon primes and a good collection of Transcend CF cards.

And what sort of budget was involved?

It was a self-funded film and for that reason alone I was desperate to keep the budget down. I received a lot of help during the whole process and I managed to keep the final budget below the







The rural location proved very cost-effective





£20,000 mark. Some folk get to spend more than that making a short, but I didn't have that luxury. There wasn't time to launch a Kickstarter campaign.

Was this your ideal topic for a film or do you have other favourite genres?

I've got fairly eclectic tastes when it comes to film. I'm often attracted to the ones where you have a guy making his stand against the system, or a 'guys on a mission' tale. Basically, any film where the main character is forced to leave his or her comfort zone and sets off on a journey of discovery, showing their true mettle along the way. Sci-fi and war films appeal to me very much, but I can't say I have a favourite genre as such, as long as it's a visually striking world we're introduced to. I was probably about twelve when I saw 2001: A Space Odyssey, and I remember that had a big impact on me at the time. The Shawshank Redemption has to be one of my favourite films.



What was the most difficult part of the overall process?

Staying focused for such long periods of time - this was the first film of that length where I was producing, directing and operating a camera on top of that. I wasn't in the best health before the production began, but by the end of it I was a mess. It had been exhausting trying to get Grace and Danger off the ground, so finding myself wearing so many hats after that experience was like trying to attempt a sprint at the end of a marathon. I cut the film myself, too (although under a pseudonym) and ended up scoring much of it with licensed music. It all gets very demanding towards the end of a film, when you can find yourself gradually running out of steam.

Do you have a distribution deal? If so, talk us through that.

I have a distribution deal with Koan Inc. in the US. They've already sold the film to buyers in the Middle East and in Benelux - it will be broadcast on TV in the Lebanon in September and released on DVD in Benelux in December. It's already out in the States via Cinecliq and I've released it here in the UK, myself, through Distrify.com.

So will you stick with producing or directing?

Directing, without a doubt! That's the artistic part, working with the actors and crew, putting your



Going for a take

The filming schedule was pretty intense

> Make sure you get at least one biggish name in the cast, otherwise it will be harder to get distribution

vision on the screen, whereas a producer usually ends up dealing with lots of technical and logistical problems and naturally has to be very business savvy. Not that I'm lazy, but it's always best to play to your strengths. I really enjoy working with actors and working through each scene - always be open to their suggestions and creative input.

And what lies ahead for you now?

I'm waiting for the last few things to fall into place for Grace and Danger, my WWII film; of course, the last few things include the finance! Several companies are interested in being the 'last money in' - since the recession began, people are taking fewer risks. All understandable, but it makes things harder for indie productions to get started. I've got great actors lined up and highly experienced crew members (the SFX team worked on The Expendables 1 and 2 plus World War Z).

So, any advice for other filmmakers starting out?

Enrol on either a filmmaking course or go to film school. Alternatively, read as many books about your filmmaking heroes as possible and watch lots and lots of films! (taking notes along the way) - especially classic films from key periods of cinema history. You'll also find a host of







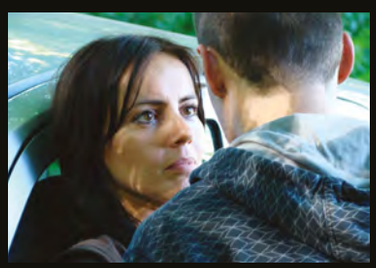
behind-the-scenes material and documentaries on YouTube, so it's worth spending time exploring these resources. Ultimately, there's no substitute for hands-on experience and you can get that by either making your own short films, or by working on someone else's production. If you want to direct films, then it's a good idea to know as much as possible about the various production roles and what each role entails.

Are there any obvious do's and don't's?

These days, you have to do a proper risk assessment at every single location. It wasn't a legal requirement back when I shot Heavy Duty and, due to time constraints, I didn't get the chance to do this thoroughly; looking back, I could've avoided some potentially serious mishaps. For example, we were filming Lucy LaVey running up a steep embankment, which didn't look too steep from the ground, but in reality if you tried running up it yourself it wasn't very safe. At one point, she fell (not too far, thankfully!), but managed to break her fall by landing on the sound recordist, who was propped against a tree.



It's always better to be over-prepared and to anticipate all the potential dangers/challenges. Another important consideration is audio - we bought our own gear, but because it wasn't the top-of-the-range equipment, more time was needed to fix things in post. The key is to get your hands on the best equipment possible, because there are areas where you'll only create more problems if you attempt to cut every corner. Another thing is to be realistic about your own energy levels; making a feature film is a lot of hard work - maybe less so with a good sized crew to assist, but when you're on location and up against challenging weather conditions or whatever and working long hours it can be draining. Try to get as much sleep as possible each night during the



production or you'll end up feeling very rough. Also, work on building up your fitness levels prior to the production, as that will be another big help in helping you to fight off pangs of fatigue. Schedule as much actor rehearsal time prior to the production as possible - that way, you can reduce any unnecessary dialogue before you get to shoot the scenes.

Finally, make sure you get at least one biggish name in the cast, otherwise it will be harder to get distribution - to most buyers, that aspect will be more important than the overall quality of the film; it will also help you when it comes to raising finance. ■







LESSONS FROM THE REAL WORLD

Paul Wyatt believes that shooting documentaries can teach many a filmmaker valuable production techniques for all types of film work

Filmmakers are storytellers who bring life to characters on a page and use lens and light to illustrate a journey and tell their story. The best stories in film or real life are people-based as we need to relate, feel and become involved in our characters as they become our emotional barometers to the dramatic events happening around them.



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Joseph Luck, Matthew McGregor and Paul Wyatt setting for an interview



Storytelling doesn't always depend on a script and if you look around the real world you'll see people with causes, concerns, talents and silliness just waiting to be documented. For the filmmaker who wants to keep busy (and keep the pennies rolling in), learning about documentary production can be no bad thing.



Matt Holding at Geevor Tin Mine

Work-wise you're much more likely to be commissioned to produce a promo film or a short form documentary piece than a dramatic one. Drama productions are notoriously badly paid, if they're paid at all.

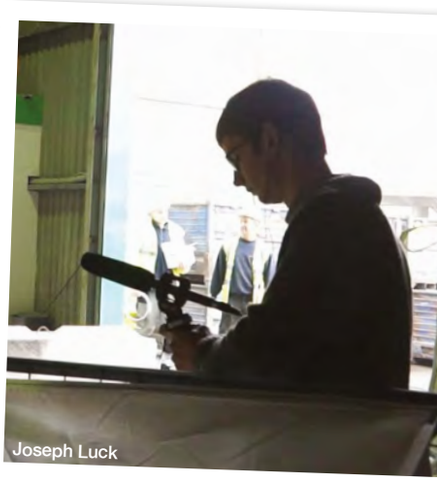
A glance over at Talent Circle and Skillpages prove this out, with reams of jobs offered as 'experience' or 'expenses only'. Having one foot in another form of film production can bring in the money to take part in this low-paid work in order to build up a reel to help raise funding for bigger projects. This is something I do by filming and editing video profile pieces and short form documentaries, which gives me the freedom to indulge my more dramatic side by producing scripted season trailers for the Lazarus theatre company's performances at the Greenwich and Blue Elephant venues.

Crossover skills

You can't write for characters unless you understand people. If you're interested in learning about characters and telling their stories then documentary is a terrific primer for understanding people, story structure and how narrative works. These are great skills to take across to scripted pieces. Documenting on film is hard work, which involves setting up shots quickly, capturing events or comments on the first take and evolving your film as the individuals draw you into their story. The narrative of the piece depends on where the person featured takes you. As a self-shooter and editor, short form documentary is a great way to learn about working quickly and efficiently, as well as making rapid-fire decisions on what shots you need to cover a shoot and how much material you need from those being interviewed. These are perfectly transferable filmmaker skills.

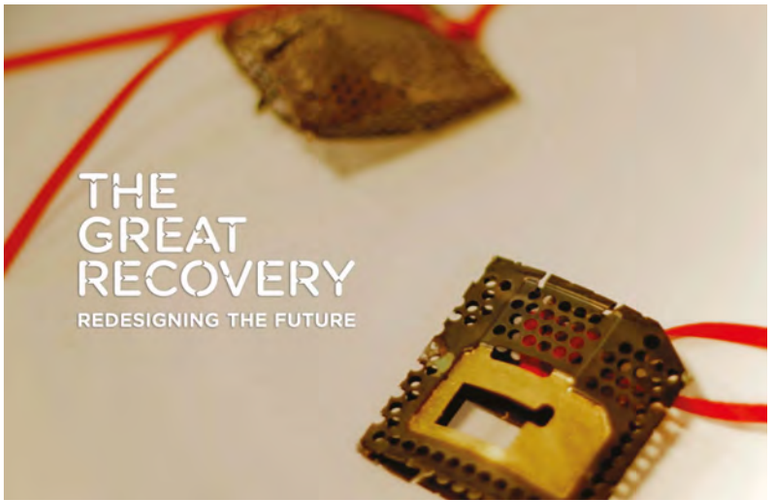
The great recovery

What I didn't know about filmmaking I learned on The Royal Society of Art's Great Recovery project whilst running around tin mines and recycling plants where, over the course of six months and 18 short films, I learned to how to edit in my head, shoot with very little kit and how the cutaway shot can save your life in an edit.



Joseph Luck



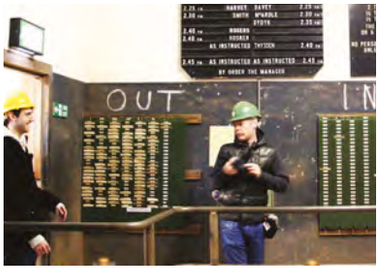





Detail shot from LMB Textiles

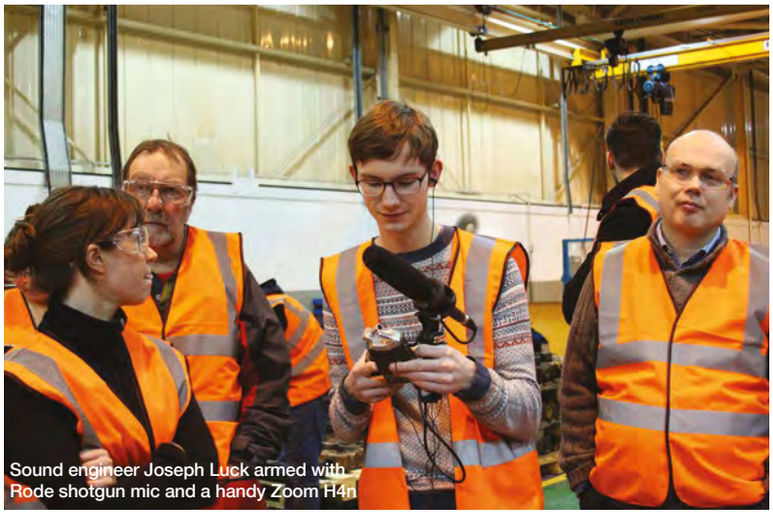

Exterior shot of Geevor tin mine

The Great Recovery is a two year project run by the Action and Research Centre at the RSA and its aim is to build a cross disciplinary design community to drive forward a new resource efficient economy. Run by co-directors of Design, Sophie Thomas and Nat Hunter, the project set out to bring together as many different people representing all groups of the Circular Network together to observe, debate, tear apart, rebuild and co-create a wide variety of products. During the project's first phase, seven public workshops were organised around the country, which we would attend and film groups being given electrical appliances such as a washing machine, flat screen monitors, mobile phones, laptops and digital cameras. Tasks were set to rate these objects on ease of disassembly, value of components after disassembly and rarity of materials.



Nat Hunter had previously asked me to film the opening film for The Great Recovery where the purpose of the project would be outlined with commentary, from people such as product designer Sebastian Conran and Chief Executive of the RSA, Matthew Taylor. It was a nicely produced piece, which developed alongside the early stages of the project itself. That meant we didn't cling to any initial brief too tightly as to do so would have damaged the eventual film. It ably got across the core values of the project in an informative and accessible way and was helped along by the musical wonders of Lemon Jelly's Fred Deakin.

A few months later, I was then asked to film the first batch of Great Recovery workshops taking place in the autumn of 2012, which saw us in hard hats filming cheek to jowl down a disused tin mine in Cornwall, at an e-waste recyclers and on the factory floor at a plastics and electronics recycler. The films would be an


Sound engineer Joseph Luck armed with Rode shotgun mic and a handy Zoom H4n

"That's an awful lot to film and edit down into a five minute film and, with one day to do each shoot, the pressure was on"

interesting mix of 'live' event, in the form of the workshop itself and the discussions taking place, which would be wrapped around a tour of the facility, an interview with the facilities host and a section that would be kept quite loose, which I marked up on the daily call sheets as 'other interesting stuff'. This might be a focus on people at the workshop, such as Sir Kenneth Grange and Terrence Woodgate, who took part in the workshop taking place at Sweeep Kuusakoski in Kent.

That's an awful lot to film and edit down into a five minute film and, with one day to do each shoot, the pressure was on. Armed with two cameras, Matt Holding to assist and Joseph Luck on location sound, we set off to Geevor tin mine in Cornwall for the first Great Recovery workshop.


Matt Holding filming at Geevor tin mine for the RSA's Great Recovery Project

Production valued

In some respects I'd made a rod for my own back by insisting on keeping the style and production values that the original film had for workshop films. Initially, this took time to set up as I wanted these to be accessible, informative and intriguing for viewers, without a hint of loftiness or going down the exhibition film route of putting the subject under glass and therefore being unreachable to the audience.


Filming location footage using a Sony VG20 at Geevor tin mine

Dramas are known for beginning with 'cold opens' to hook a viewer in and this technique was used by looking for bold statements and intriguing visuals to open each film. This helps to keep the viewers' attention and reel them in for the next few minutes. In the middle of the piece, you repeat the technique to make sure the viewers are still with you. I wanted the films to be 'produced' and packaged as episodes of a series with original music from James Fogarty and 'Five Minute Pop Promo' and project credits on them. Opening sequences were laboured over to set the right tone and hook the audience in.

B roll is your friend

If you want to learn how to 'cover a shoot', the best place to do this is working on a documentary or event film. Covering a shoot is making sure you've got enough

PROFILE: JAMES FOGARTY ON COMPOSING FOR DOCUMENTARIES

Music can be an excellent tool for the filmmaker. It can highlight visual cues, help drive a narrative, suggest emotional connection and (let's be honest), help to cover up those 'blips' in recorded sound or between cuts. Original, bespoke music can help raise an already-effective film to the next level. But how effectively can composing for screen step away from the well-known film score and slink towards pre-scoring and documentary? My own recent experience pre- and simultaneously-scoring was for a short film about Maria Hanson, an established Designer Maker and Reader in Metalwork and Jewellery at Sheffield Hallam University, which was produced for the RSA's Great Recovery Project by Paul Wyatt. The experience left me with a positive outlook on the subject.

When composing for documentary, my primary concern is ensuring that I have a proper understanding of the work. This includes not only the general subject matter, but also the particular ideas or concepts being highlighted in the film.

Working on a post-scored film, this is relatively easily achieved. To put it simply - watch the film, make notes and compose to it. The pre-scored film, however, presents more of a challenge. As there is no definitive cut provided, the composer has the added bonus of having to predict visual context when writing appropriate music. An understanding of the filmmaker's previous work and musical selections can help a composer anticipate what is likely to be required. As a filmmaker, it makes a world of difference to provide your composer with representative examples of work. The key word here being representative: yes, your 15-minute pièce-de-résistance full of artistic shots and breathing space is beautiful, but will it really give me a feel for the current short film involving lots of quick cuts and voxpops?



This particular film was looking at Maria's involvement in the 'What's In My Stuff?' project - specifically, her recreation of the periodic table in jewellery made with metals and components found in everyday objects. My question was then, how do I represent this musically? I set to work experimenting with different sounds in Logic Pro, creating a sound environment that reflected both the electronic component origins and the jewellery end result. In the end, I provided a number of musical segments, matched both to the project and to segments of footage that could be moved and cut as required.

Working in this way does, however, require that the filmmaker has a proper understanding of the composer's work as well and a desire to remain true to the music provided. Otherwise, what is the point in having bespoke music? It is essential that both filmmaker and composer trust each other artistically. Ultimately, this relationship can be the most creatively fulfilling for both parties.

And finally...never give up

Don't be afraid. Having someone on-board who specialises in music will only enhance your work, and bespoke music can go so much further than a run of the mill, bog-standard library track.



Shooting in London using a Sony VG900 with a Sony 50mm F1.4 lens

material to see you through the edit of the piece. Similarly, in a drama you'd make sure you have enough cutaway shots (or 'B' roll material) for a scene, just in case something has gone wrong with a particular set-up. In documentary it's even more important. To link pieces in the edit, or to cover an interview, you need to have material to cut away to. We interviewed a lot of people who would take pauses when they were collecting their thoughts about what to say or just said "uhmm" or "ahh" a lot. This doesn't look good on camera, so to make the flow appear seamless you look eagle-eyed for shots



Canon 7D

around them that you can cut to hide the joins of the pauses.

You can do this easily by asking them about something you'd already filmed, which gives you something to show with their voice over that footage. With the Great Recovery, if a particular person had appeared in the facility tour footage we would find them later and ask them about the tour. Generally, using short takes of people being interviewed in vision is enough for this type of piece combined with plenty of visually interesting cutaways. When you're confronted with a small room in a mine with 30 people, you have to develop an eye for detail. With the tear down exercises we were spoilt for choice with 50mm and 35mm close-up shots of circuit boards or people's expressions when bashing a washing machine with a hammer.

"When you've got two cameras and a sound engineer in one room it becomes tricky to stay out of each other's way." explains Matt Holding, assistant producer on the Geevor workshop project. "We ran into some terrible problems in post with recording audio from two different sources. The audio was recorded separate to the image and we found Red Giant's PluralEyes would sometimes confuse the stream and sync Paul's audio recorded for his camera with mine, because we were recording so close to each other. Later in the project, we chose to have only one camera with audio being recorded for it and the second camera would concentrate on B roll material and effectively be mute"



A product teardown of a washing machine at Geevor tin mine



Detail cutaway shot from the tour footage



Sony NEX VG20



Shot of Geevor tin mine as Great Recovery participants take part in the mine tour

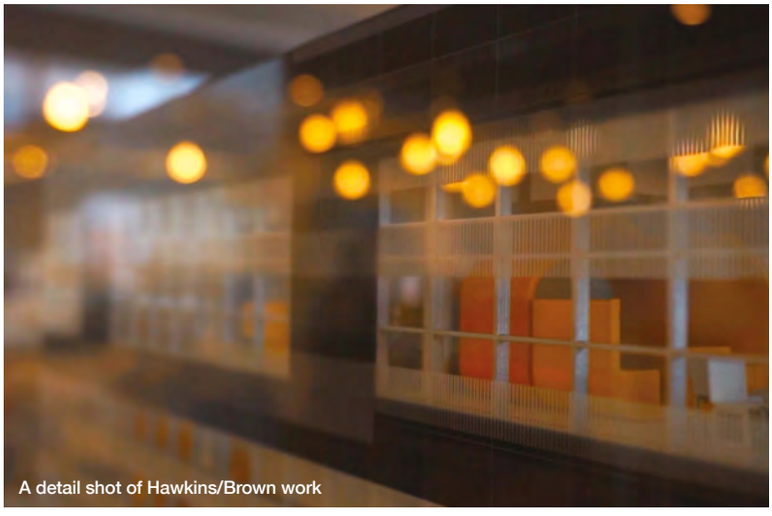
Essential (and lightweight) kit

DSLR's can be ridiculous choices for 'live' work as they overheat, have focusing issues and can only record for limited amounts at any

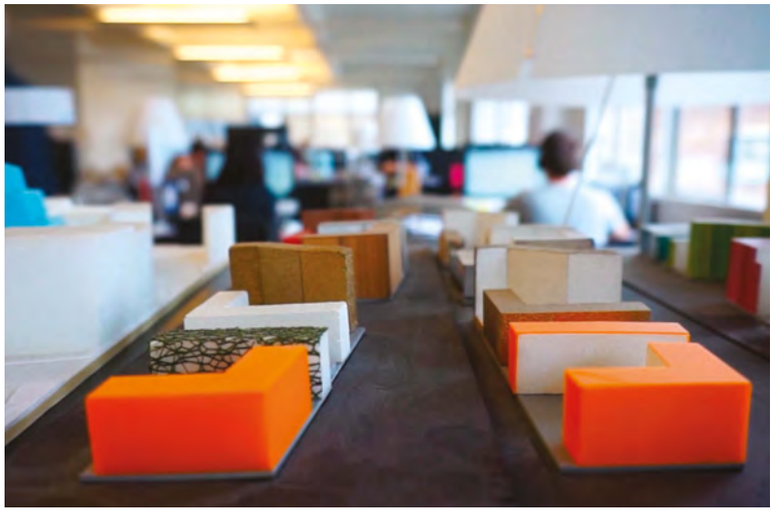




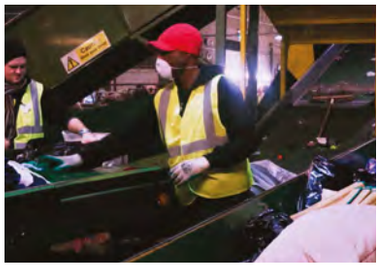
The quirky detail present at architectural practice Hawkins/Brown



A detail shot of Hawkins/Brown work

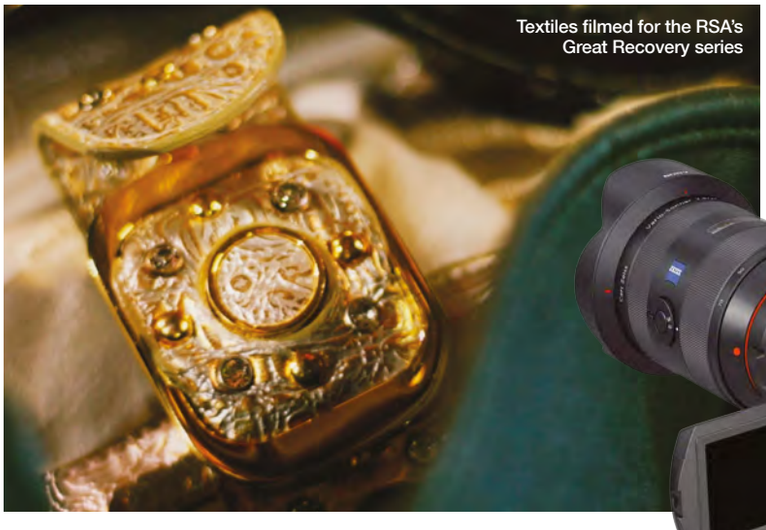


one time. As The Great Recovery shoots were a combination of live material and more stylised shot set-ups, a Canon 7D was used for a few of the early shoots for the more stylized shoots. This soon changed, as we needed to capture so much material on the facility tours that I needed a camera that I could change lenses on and set up at double quick speed. The Sony VG20 and Sony VG900 were used and proved perfect for these shoots. Lightweight and easy to cradle to secure a steady shot, these cameras were assets when it came to running around and bagging shots at high speed. We couldn't use a tripod on the tours so, it was essential to record at 50fps and with high-quality lenses. Focusing could be an issue at times, especially in the live discussion section of the workshop, but generally the Sony's auto focus worked well. I



was impressed enough to use the VG900 for more dramatic styled work for the Lazarus Theatre Companies Spring 2013 trailer and a documentary for architects Hawkins/Brown. The included adapter lets you use very nice A mount lenses for some pin sharp imagery too.

For sound, Joseph Luck roamed around the shoots with a variety of Rode and Sennheiser mics. For some of the pieces to camera a Sony ECM 44b Lavalier was used. We also had a Switronix TorchLED light mounted to the camera, or a light stand when needed and a couple of lightweight Manfrotto video tripods. As we were travelling around a fair bit for the shoots, being able to put everything in to a couple of kit bags and setting up quickly was essential.



Textiles filmed for the RSA's Great Recovery series



Sony NEX VG900

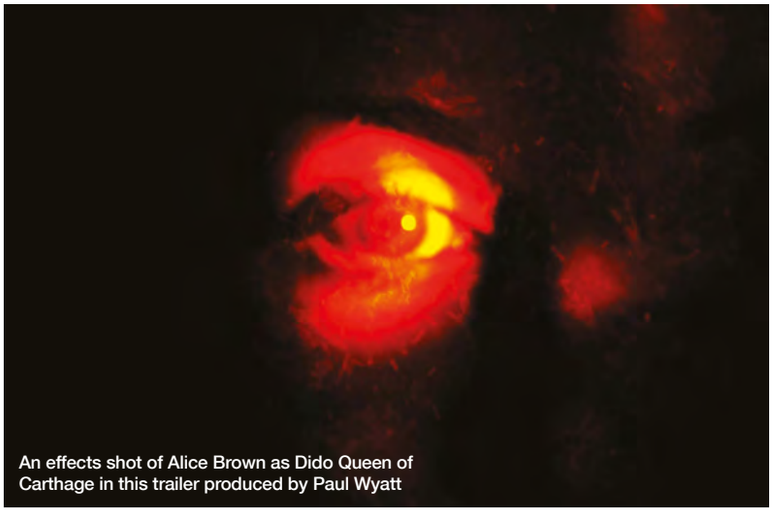
Watch out for the fork lift truck!

The schedule for the workshop day for all the activities ran from 9.30 to about 4.30. This was used to create a call sheet for the crew with a shot list and times for memory cards on cameras to be copied and cleared, plus batteries powered up. Although what would happen and unfold during the day was unknown there were certain required shots, which we could anticipate and then grab early in





Jennifer Shakesby portrays King Lear in this trailer for the Lazarus Theatre Companies season



An effects shot of Alice Brown as Dido Queen of Carthage in this trailer produced by Paul Wyatt



the morning. For the tour of the facility we only had one go at getting it right. If the tour lasted forty minutes we had that amount of time to bag at least sixty shots to cover us in the edit for the film. I'd run around after the tour party with Matt changing lenses on the Sony VG900 and keeping very, very steady during takes as there was no time to do any of it with a tripod. The steady shot on the Sony camera was a lifesaver for this and also being able to record at 50fps and slow motion footage when needed. At Geevor tin mine there were so many shot opportunities with this glorious tin mine having been converted to a museum with the original kit rooms and mine shaft still there. Working at this speed you are constantly looking for visually interesting object juxtapositions, converging lines, low angles, high angles, reflective foregrounds and how you can film through objects to produce interesting effects.

This type of filming is all about trusting your instincts and looking for an angle or a story thread as you experience the day. It's a continual process of filming and planning the edit strand as you work your way through the shoot. You need to keep one part of your brain fixed firmly on the edit and another on what's happening during the day. With a lot of documentary there's this feeling that it'll 'Come together in the edit' and many a documentary has. But on a project like this you don't have that luxury of time, so you need to have an idea where your thread through the piece is. "What's the primary focus of the day", "What topics are the most heated in the Q&A?" and "How can these be tied in with the tour footage and the interview with the facility manager?"

Learning to edit in your head like this is an invaluable asset for any filmmaker, be it for documentary or dramatic productions. Knowing when you have enough material and that the shoot is 'covered' is an invaluable skill and will save (most of) the nightmares in edit.



Sometimes after reviewing the footage on a shoot day we'd ask a member of The Great Recovery team to do a piece to camera for us at the facility, which would have a linear structure based on the day's events and the footage filmed and would be something the edit could be glued to.

Edit hell and joy

For this entire project there was about 70 hours of footage locked away on external hard drives. Adobe Premiere was used for the first batch of films in 2012 with Avid subsequently used for those produced in 2013. We synced the material using PluralEyes, which wasn't always a straightforward process with some manual syncing needed. During any edit process, tagging of footage is essential so that similar topic items can be found and the edit linked together. If someone mentions the sea outside the Tin Mine then search for a clip of it. Tagging is tedious, but a requirement if you don't want to keep having to wade through clip bins.

Project highs and lows

The first workshop film took longer to make simply because there was so much material to choose from. With any edit job there's a danger that you're not doing enough justice to the material, so for this job several shorter items were spun out into their own films. We could easily have produced five more films from the combined workshop events, but you have to factor in time and budget and eventually let the project go.

After a break, we came back to the project in 2013 for another batch of films, all recorded over a week. These were less teardown


Sony NEX 7

focused and concentrated more on the tours and the people running the facilities. One change I did make was replacing the Sony VG cameras with a teeny tiny Sony NEX 7 and a Sony NEX 6. I'd learned that these cameras elicited a much more relaxed response from people when they're interviewed in front of them. They still produce a massive full HD image, but this second batch of films featuring fascinating folk, such as elemental jewellery maker Maria Hanson and Sheffield Hallum University's Dr Hywel Jones and East End textile recycler Ross Barry, feel more intimate than the first lot of films.

When you're storytelling, what matters is that the shot is nicely composed, the sound is good and the editing has a clear linear strand to it. The NEX 7 and 6 did a sterling job and are now permanently in my kit bag as back-up cameras.

Coming straight out of the RSA job into a scripted piece for a promo trailer for Lazarus Theatre Company made me trust my judgement as a filmmaker much more with set-ups and shots, and also be comfortable when it came to knowing I'd covered the shoot and was ready for the edit and the whole shoot was wrapped in only three hours. I was then approached to film a one-off documentary about architects Hawkins/Brown produced for an event at the RIBA, which having spent six months on The Great Recovery, meant I could focus on the architect interviews and then grab all the necessary cutaway shots and people detail very quickly indeed.

If you're working for scripted productions, you'll find a dip into the documentary world offers valuable filmmaking lessons by helping you developing a good eye for a shot and how to work economically and very, very quickly. In this world of the teeny tiny budget this is a skill very much in demand. ■

With thanks to the RSA/Great Recovery project
www.greatrecovery.org.uk
and Leonora Oppenheim
www.leonoraoppenheim.com



A still from The Great Recovery Workshop

"Adobe Premiere was used for the first batch of films in 2012 with Avid subsequently used for those produced in 2013"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Wyatt is an award-winning creative director, filmmaker and author. He has worked with clients including The RSA, Sennheiser, Virgin Media and Adobe. He has been on the judging panel of ITV's design challenge series Whose London? as well as a judge for international design tournament Cut&paste. Paul is the author of The Digital Creative's Survival Guide, which is out now.

Jon Towlson talks to Alec Birkbeck of Takeitoutside films about Stop the Dog, his quirky feature for the Virgin Media Shorts competition

STOP THE DOG

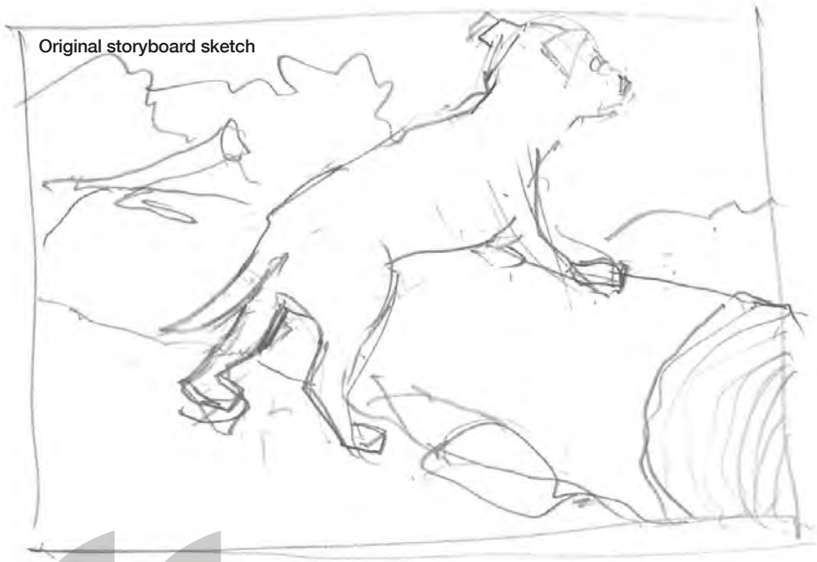
'Never work with children or animals' is the oft-quoted maxim of the entertainment industry, and one that director Alec Birkbeck of Takeitoutside films decided to completely ignore (at least the bit about animals) when he made his short for the 2013 Virgin Media Shorts Competition.



Stop The Dog tells the 'tail' of a Labrador with good intentions, but a very clumsy nature. Canine heroes have been a staple of cinema since the very beginning, when Cecil Hepworth filmed Rescued by Rover in 1905 (inventing screen direction in the process); then of course there was Lassie, the adventurous collie who became the sensation of film, television and radio in the 1940s and 1950s. Stop The Dog stars one Harvey Waggington, a delightfully mischievous black Labrador, who belongs to the director's dad. Originally an assistance dog, Harvey never made it in that first career because of his inability to focus; the very star-quality in fact that makes Harvey stand out in Alec's film. Harvey however, unlike Rover or Lassie, does very little rescuing in the film - quite the opposite in fact - he's a total liability, as numerous walkers and cyclists discover to their cost.

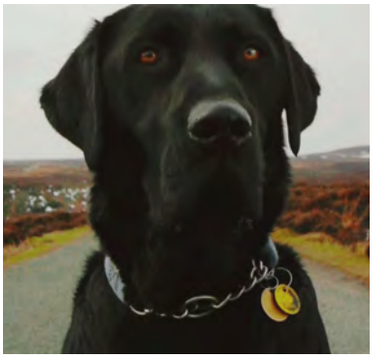
So what inspired Alec to make a film about a disastrous doggie?





Original storyboard sketch

> **A short about a dog, but with a twist. I like the idea of taking the old adage 'a man's best friend' and turning it on its head**



"During an earlier film shoot, we were constantly being interrupted by dog walkers and their dogs." Alec recalls. "One cheeky Jack Russell even stole the sandwiches from one of the crew! This gave me the idea that I should write a short about a dog, but with a simple twist. I like the idea of taking the old adage 'a man's best friend' and turning it on its head."

Taking a twist

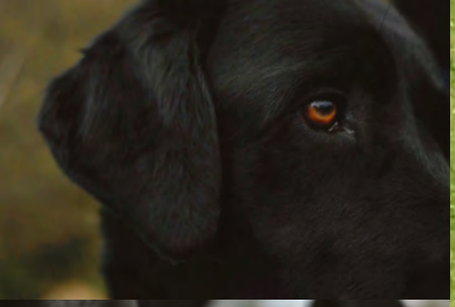
And turn it on its head he does. In one memorable shot, the camera pulls back to reveal the extent of Harvey's chaos - as at least a dozen hapless hikers and ramblers lie helpless at the foot of a crevice having been pushed over it by the mangy mutt. The earlier film shoot that Alec refers to, by the way, was Make the Move, a mountain bike movie with a twist. Both shorts can be seen by visiting Alec's website www.takeitoutsidefilms.co.uk, and prove that Alec is a filmmaker of considerable technical as well as creative ability. Slickly edited, beautifully shot and entertaining, Alec is clearly no amateur, despite only taking to film fairly recently.



"I purchased my first camera (Panasonic GH2) about 2 years ago, and since then have spent my time making mistakes, watching tutorials, de-constructing films and making more mistakes. I like the creative freedom that comes with storytelling and the challenge of finding ways to convey my ideas into film."

Stop the Dog includes some remarkable tracking shots that are all the more impressive for having been achieved on a rig built by Alec himself. "My background is in industrial design," Alec reveals,









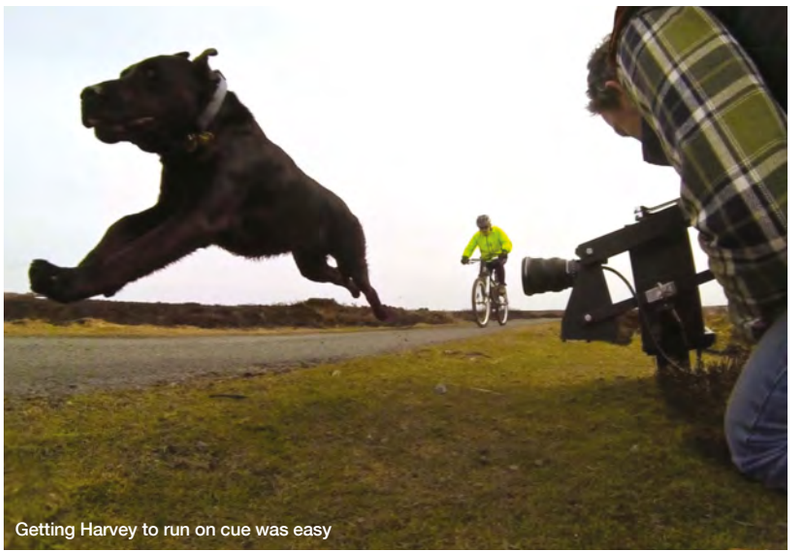


"So I relish the time spent in my workshop making rigs for special visual requirements, like the tracking shots in this film. But I also like to disassemble kit that I have bought, and customise it for my specific needs. I am currently building a 6 metre plus dolly track for use with my Kessler crane on my next film." All very impressive. Alec takes us through the process of building said rig on his blog and you can also get an overview of progress on page 67.

Keeping it short

The blog itself was featured as a Virgin Media Top Blog back in July, which bodes well for Alec's chances in the Virgin Shorts Competition. He deserves at least a sniff on the basis of the film's tracking shots and storyboards alone, which are highly professional. But did Harvey take well to direction? "Harvey Waggington was originally trained as an assistance dog, but sadly he failed his exams as he was deemed to be too playful and somewhat clumsy."

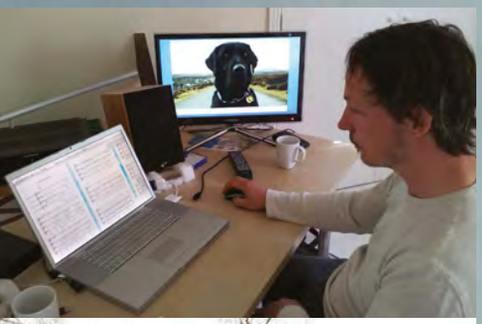


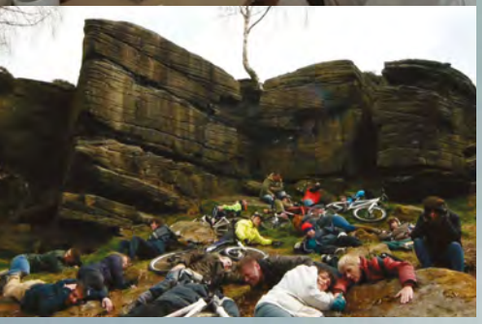


Getting Harvey to run on cue was easy

Alec explains. "However, he was entirely happy with cameras and rigs, so during some simple test filming, we soon established that he would consistently run from one person to another, even over long distances. This gave us confidence that we could get the long running shots with ease.

The main adaptations to the





storyboard came from Harvey's reluctance to bark on demand, and also to sit still for long enough to set focus. Like most dogs, he gets bored very quickly and camera set-ups can take time. Although we soon learned that a good stick was all that was required to keep him focused on the job at hand." Other tricks to coax a performance from Harvey included fitting a harness to a low trailer so that Alec could hang out the back with a steadicam and a

"Like most dogs, he gets bored very quickly and camera set-ups can take time... A good stick was all that was required"

On the set with cast and crew

good supply of doggy treats. Harvey did have one limitation though, as Alec explains on his blog: "Harvey could only do two speeds: "standing still" or "really fast" so I slowed the clip down 50% to keep the detail in the image." Despite this, the four and a half days of actual filming with Harvey Waggington was a breeze compared to the difficulties of coping with outside locations, other interested dogs and very changeable weather, Alec reveals.

Sound and vision

Job eventually done, the final piece in the puzzle for Alec was getting the right soundtrack. He wanted something that would evoke the clumsiness of his loveable star. The solution came in the form of musician friend Nick Salmon, who wrote a piece for Sheffield-based saxophone



The score was recorded swiftly

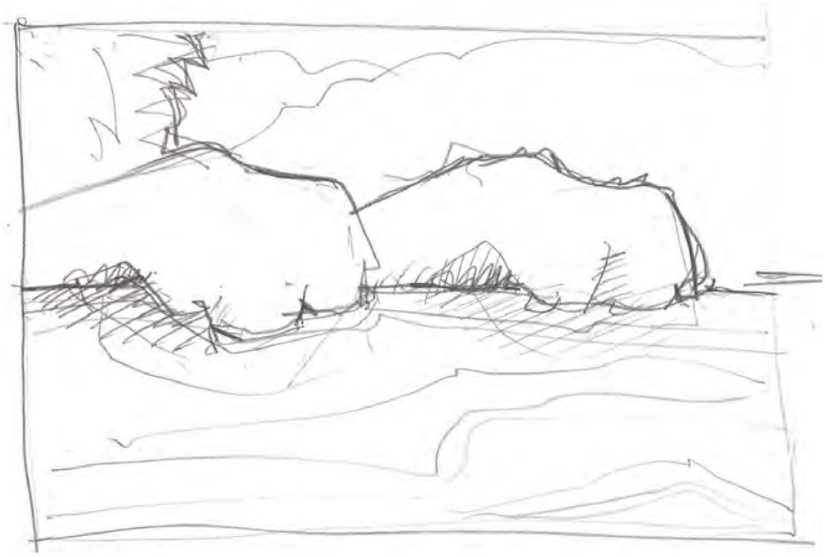
quartet, Steel City Sax. An hour and a half of studio time later at Purple Pro Studios in Leeds, the soundtrack was in the bag.

Next up for Alec was to create a Facebook following for his debuting Michael Caine-ine. This he did with some very cute doggie photos of Harvey Waggington 'posing' for the camera, wearing spectacles, drawing with pencil and paper and doing some DIY with a spanner. Altogether: 'ahhh'. The film is, incidentally, doing very well on Vimeo, getting praise from animal lovers everywhere and being pinned on various creature sites like The Ark in Space, a website devoted to extraordinary animals.

The next step

What's Alec up to now? "I am working on two new films", he tells us, "the first is a 45 second spoof comedy with Harvey Waggington (as a new character) and the second film is more an experimental, dark narrative but with some commercial appeal. My main objectives for both films are to collaborate with different people to learn about new techniques and also to make connections for future possibilities."

In the meantime, you can vote for Stop The Dog at the Virgin Media Shorts by visiting Virgin Media on Facebook or on Twitter. If you can't tweet, woof! ■





Stop the Dog poster art

ALEC BIRKBECK ON BUILDING DOLLY RIGS

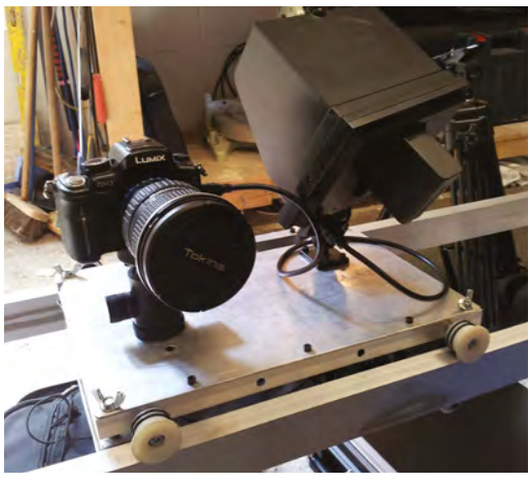


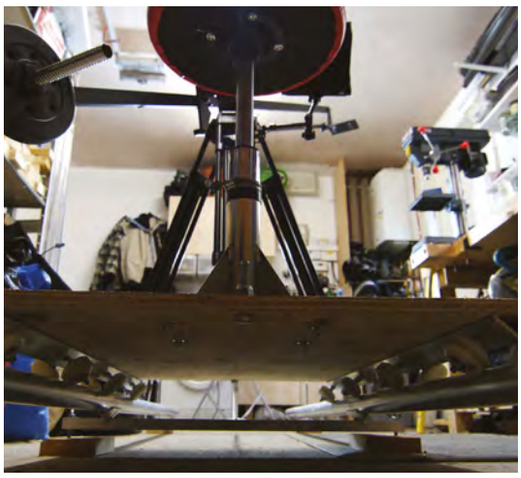
One of the scenes in my new film requires a guy to be running along and jumping. I needed a way to capture this so that it helped to convey the sense of speed and action. There are many ways to film this type of scene, but I thought I would have a go at building a dolly track and see how it looks in HD slow motion (FS700). Plus, I think a rig like this will be useful for other films too. There are plenty of tutorials online for stuff like this, so after a bit of research and a shortlist of requirements, I started looking for materials. The first challenge was getting some nice aluminium tubes with a close-fitting sleeve to strengthen the joints. I have used guide tubes with an outside diametre of 44.2mm, an inside diametre of 38.2mm and 1.5 metres in length. The inner sleeves have an outside diametre of 38mm by 0.7 metre long, which I purchased from a huge aluminium extrusion factory in Morley, West Yorkshire. They have a vast range of different sizes, but you have to buy 5 metre lengths!

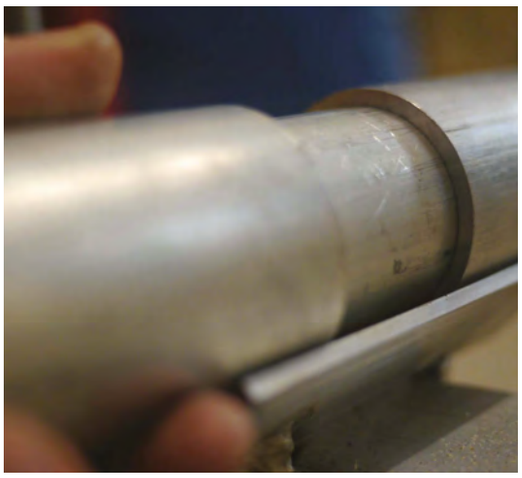
The 'Sleepers' are placed under the joins and are also height adjustable for uneven ground (It takes about 10 minutes to set up, with a long spirit level). I have used 16 x 52mm diameter hard, flat skateboard wheels and spaced them out so that any minor bumps on one set of wheels should be smoothed-out by the load on the others. The other key component in a dolly rig is the person pushing or pulling, so I made a long 'T' handle, which can easily be attached to either end of the dolly, depending on the direction required. It has a 12mm rose joint at the connection end to allow the user to move to any side of the track. I am starting with a 4.5 metre length of track, as this should be enough for my immediate filming needs. But if required I could extend it further.

My next rig projects

I need to modify the Kessler crane to reduce the 'wobble' that it gives, and to make it a much smoother operation. I'm also thinking about the visual opportunities of fitting it to my Toyota Hi-lux pick-up. ■







BLOODY STUFF

PART ONE

Props and special effects can transform any kind of filmmaking project. So where do you go when you want that bottle of fake blood? Keith Harding, owner and Managing Director of Bloody Stuff reveals all...

How did Bloody Stuff come about?

I had been working on numerous music video, drama and documentary features and had struggled on every occasion to secure advice, props and effects without having to scour the country and sometimes the world to find them from a myriad of different companies. Over the years, we have made many contacts and friends with individuals and companies in the industry and I realised that we could pull together this knowledge and create a database of professionals and specialist individuals with their own unique skills. That would allow Bloody Stuff to source props, effects, services and commission specific custom items, props, prosthetics and all the rest of it, in order to fulfill a void in the market for a production company to have one contact and company to discuss their entire props and effects requirements. Whilst we are not suggesting that we stock, or can even supply every conceivable prop or effect requirement, we can act as a consultancy to pull all of the necessary bits together, to augment the items that we do stock or specialise in.

Bloody Stuff as a name, just seemed to say it all, although its greatest connection to props, is years of saying to myself, 'where on earth am I gonna find all this 'bloody stuff?'

Why did you start the business?

I had seen a massive void in the market, between big-budget Hollywood feature films and everyone else basically, where the big movies had budgets and personnel sufficient to make, build or buy whatever they wanted. I couldn't help feel that there was a market for a company with expertise in all different facets of the market to put together a range of products and services that could be used as hopefully an extension to their production team that could take care of props, effects and even make-up. I realised early on, that having every type of prop to cover every genre of film or drama, clearly was not going to be practical or commercially viable, so my alliances with other individuals and companies around the world was going to be important,



Keith Harding
is the managing director of TX-2 Broadcast Ltd, incorporating BloodyStuff Props and Effects, BeyondHD Camera Equipment rentals and Black Armored Drone, Remote Aerial Cinematography for RED Epic and other large film cameras.
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+44 20 3651 6994
3 Mills Studio, Three Mills Lane, London, E3 3DU

but also, working out of 3 Mills Studios in East London, gave me the idea to concentrate stocking services, props and effects primarily for horror and gangster-type productions and build up a repertoire of products and services suitable for those genres would be the way to go.

3 Mills Studios is located just seven miles from Soho, four miles from the historic City of London, close to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and within easy reach of a wide range of versatile locations in East London and the rural South East of England. It's an ideal production base, with 11 stages ranging in size from 3,500 sq ft to 13,500 sq ft, as well as all of the ancillary space you would expect from a key studio facility, such as production offices, rehearsal rooms, make-up/dressing rooms, green rooms, prop stores and workshops. The studios have hosted and inspired some hugely successful filmmakers over the years, including Tim Burton, Wes Anderson, David Cronenburg, Guy Ritchie and Peter Strickland. Danny Boyle has a particular fondness for 3 Mills having made four films at the Studios (Trance, Sunshine, Millions and 28 Days Later) as well as a planning the London 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony from there.

What were you doing before this business?

I've been in the film and TV industry for more than 20 years (I won't say how many more, as modesty forbids). Starting off in production and doing some stringing jobs to help pay for my love of cameras and filming, I realised that there might be more money selling the equipment, rather than standing behind it. I worked for various manufacturers in the industry and, in 1996, after setting up a US HQ for a major UK broadcast equipment manufacturer, I set up my own company TX-2 Broadcast Ltd to sell and manufacture equipment. We built several large automated transmission systems and designed the first hard disk OFCOM compliance recording system and many other very high-profile systems (over 800 transmission channels are played out through automation systems and software that we've supplied and has given me all the desire



Knives and blood projectiles

I needed for bringing effects and services up to date using technology.

My business partners are Jon Wells, who is one of those guys who just understands technology, computers, IT and software and can pretty much turn his hand to solving any problems. He's my technical manager and whether he's setting up a complex motion control shoot with our Mark Roberts Motion Control systems or preparing our 12 prop helicopter for a RED Epic shoot or servicing our AirSquib, he's a man for all seasons.

My partner Ulyana is a former beautician and whilst the transition from making people happy by making them beautiful, to making someone else happy by making them hideously injured in someway, was a bit of a shock to the system, she loves the whole make-up, prosthetics and breakaway glass side of the business and now has specialised in Flocking, specifically for adding hair and fur effects to actors. She lets set designers hire the kit for props and set dressing. Our master furniture maker, similarly had conflicting feelings when asked to turn his skills of producing long lasting and beautiful wooden one-off furniture for the super yacht industry into making one-off pieces of furniture that would then be smashed to pieces upon completion. I did suggest that being on film that its longevity would be greater than that of his yacht furniture, but I'm not sure he's still not quite got used to the fate of his creations.

Is there more to special effects than meets the eye?

Special effects are like magic tricks, as a viewer it's much better not to know how things are done, but as an independent film or TV director/producer it's important to learn how to do the effects. Then starts the sometimes difficult job of finding someone who is prepared to share the knowledge and equipment or products needed to do that. Most special effects, regardless of the computers, technology or chemicals and production techniques used, tend to have their roots going right back to Hollywood in the mid 20th century. Those early pioneers had to come up with home-made devices, effects and props that would look convincing to a viewing audience

How much have special effects changed over the years?

The advantage the early pioneers of props and effect had, but the disadvantage for everyone else involved in the film, was that they did not have 'health & safety' and lawyers at every scene and a litigious culture of something always being someone else's fault. Watch the TV and the number of 'no win, no fee' adverts and what they portray as crimes worthy of imprisonment, such as having the wrong ladder, a piece of plastic on the floor, a slippery surface and then imagine what it feels like to walk on set with a hand full of explosive. Of course, I am absolutely behind the need for safety being the number one priority. Hence the reason for trying to find innovative solutions for some of the more dangerous effects, such as replacing blank firing, deactivated guns for far safer replica cap firing guns. Those are amazing, they produce sparks, smoke and cartridge ejection, just like the real thing, but with professional derivatives of the plastic caps we used as kids to play cowboys and indians.

Reduce the risk, reduce the cost is our motto and when we found a Swedish special effects guru had developed a remotely controlled bullet hit generator that could fire blood through most clothing in a convincing bullet hit way, but without the use of explosive squibs, we took on the rights to the UK for the product and have never looked back. AirSquib is one of those products, born out of necessity. Olov Nylander, the inventor, like most of us, is used to using pyrotechnic squibs and attaching a small explosive device to famous and expensive actors and then detonating it. Whilst as professionals we manage the exposure to what is effectively a dangerous situation, if we can remove the danger, then we should always strive to do that. Operating on very low air pressure (not CO_2 capsules, as they are very high pressure), AirSquib can propel our specially formulated blood through clothes, creating a very realistic bullet hit with zero danger or risk. And, because it can be so simply rigged, the whole kit can be dry-hired together with our formulated, safe and non-staining blood and operated by a stage hand, make-up or a runner, with a totally wireless remote control.

While it's going to be difficult



Bloody Stuff stocks a wide range of realistic products

to imagine a future without pyrotechnics, I'd love to see the day when only inanimate objects have explosives attached to them. As a company that uses both, we will always advise customers of the benefits and safety issues of the technologies we provide. Even pyrotechnics can have their safety vastly increased, by ensuring that the firing devices have multiple safety features, as a misfire when connecting to a power source or simple 'shorting' device can have very unfortunate consequences. Our firing devices use the latest computer technology, meaning that they will not set off effects inadvertently and, moreover, we have high levels of control over the choreography and repeatability of the effects.

What are the main differences compared to the old days?

Computers of course have made the biggest difference to everything that happens in the industry and whilst most of us are totally aware of the amount of GCI effects that are used in feature films and dramas these days, and there are more articles on this subject than you can shake a stick at, from our point of view, we of course have CGI services. But again, while we can create most effects, given enough time and money, we realised that there must be a market for having rate card effects, like muzzle flash, bullet hits in glass, walls, small explosions and additional blood hits (perhaps not quite as excessive as Spartacus, but...) and have now managed to rate card these from productions, whether they be HD or 4K.

However, most of the impact of computers for us is the ability to use simple micro controllers in products, enabling miniaturisation of very traditional products such as smoke machines. We can now supply a smoke machine with a smaller footprint than an iPhone and only 3.5cm thick, including a rechargeable battery and liquid-shot. Just this alone has opened up the ability to create smoke and gas effects without the major costs of creating special props to accommodate these, or lots of set dressing and careful camera angles to avoid power cables, tubes and so on. We can now place a complete remote-controlled smoke machine in the paper tray of a printer, the glove compartment of a car or in the engine compartment of a real moving car, simulating an overheating radiator and all without any modification to the original item.



Perhaps a hidden benefit of the computer is with the rapid advent of high-quality and cost reducing 3D printing. We can currently use this for creating moulds of products for creating rubber or foam props.



Aged and breakaway glass bottles

It's even being used to create complete robots, costumes and a whole load of other props. At this level of size and quality, the costs involved for printing are extremely high. However, every month, some new, better and lower-cost printer comes onto the market and having the benefit of our in-house 3D designer (the bit of 3D printing that doesn't come without experience or practice), we are looking at the ability to produce props such as guns, blood knives and whatever else we can imagine. Commercially-viable pricing and quality are not quite there yet to use for bulk production, but when that day comes (and it'll be very soon), we will be ready to take your order and print the 200 space guns you need for your next sci-fi army of mutant aliens.

Where do the bulk of effects come from, are they homegrown or from overseas?

Most of the effects industry is based around individuals, or small companies that have found a niche to produce something specific. Most are home grown and, with the exception of Hollywood and New York, where there are sufficient budgets and requirements for very large prop companies to sustain a business model for the hire of props and effects. But, here in the UK, while we have the talent, the equipment and specific experience for particular effects such as props, operation, make-up, prosthetics, we hope that what we can offer is bring all of the different elements together from one place, with the breadth of experience of both the props/effects, but also with our many years of actual filming and equipment hire.

There are highly skilled individuals and companies that are very competent with making specific elements, breakaway bottles, creating pyro effects or making prosthetics for example, but very few that have decided to make a business out of having several of these skills, services, products and effects under one roof - a one-stop-shop if you like. As a company where our background is in filming and all the equipment, lighting, grip equipment where we have also a rentals business for cameras such as the RED Epic, Motion Control, Jib arms and LED lighting, we understand the production process from start to finish. I've even directed and produced a couple of movies, the most recent is a horror movie that's just finished production in LA, to which I was executive producer. I think to be successful, you need to have a broad knowledge of the whole process and access then to the specialists, which is what we have aimed to do with BloodyStuff. **Part 2 next issue.** ■

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Storyboard your film using Celtx scriptwriting software

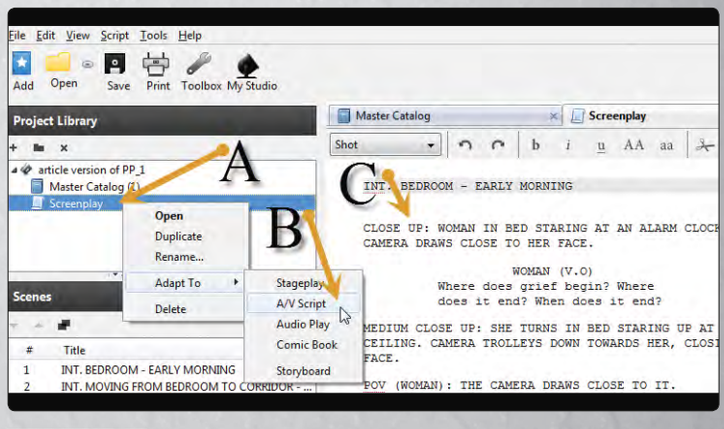


Create a workflow using Celtx's built in Storyboard creator with Paul Ekert, author of Mastering Adobe Premiere Pro CS6

In the previous issue of Digital FilmMaker you learnt how to use the free scriptwriting software Celtx, to create your film script and take it through to the production cycle. In this follow-up tutorial you will take that one step further by creating a storyboard from your script. Creating a storyboard serves many functions, not least of which, it can attempt to smooth out shooting day problems by creating a visual record of what you would like to achieve. You may even find the development of a storyboard will become an invaluable part of your creative process.

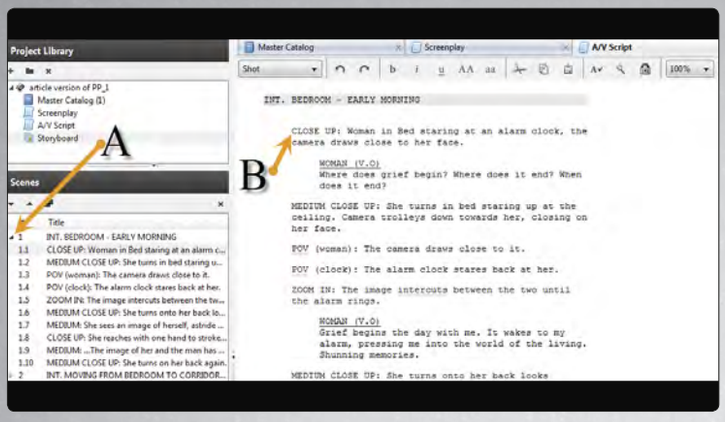
Celtx is a free program available on the PC and the Mac, as well as Android and iPad/iPhone platforms. To follow this tutorial you will need to download and install the software from www.celtx.com. With this completed, launch Celtx and create a script. It need only be a short one, but you will require a script with at least a one scene before you can move on to step 1 of this tutorial. But hey, you probably have a dozen scripts ready to go… Right?

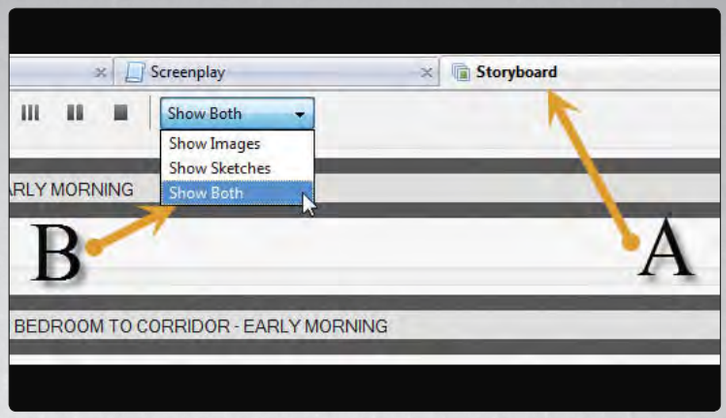
The script used in this tutorial was written by Paul Ekert, the author of Mastering Adobe Premiere Pro CS6 from Packt Publishing. If you would like to use the same script, the Celtx project file is available to download from www.PaulEkert.com.





Converting your script... First, you need to adapt your screenplay to an A/V Script. With Celtx open and with the script displayed in the main interface, convert the script by right clicking the word Screenplay in the Project Library (A), and selecting Adapt to > A/V Script (B) from the context menu. An A/V Script tab should now open in the main view area. In this tab area. add your camera and shot descriptions using Cletx's SHOT format (C).



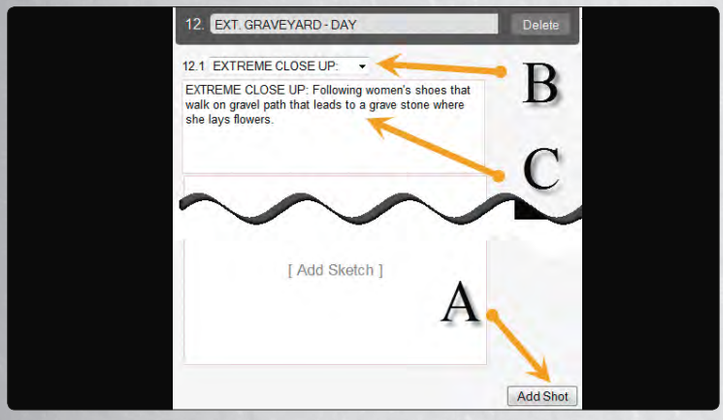


2 Creating a storyboard...

Make sure the A/V Script tab is selected. Click on the small triangle next to the scene number in the Scenes area (A). Notice that each shot you entered in the previous step (B) is represented by a sub-scene number; 1.1/1.2/1.3 and so on. Right click the word A/V Script in the Project Library and select Adapt to > Storyboard from the context menu. A storyboard element will appear in the Project Library.

3 Setting up the display...

Make sure Storyboard is the open tab in the Celtx interface (A) and check that Show Both is selected in the drop down menu (B). This allows you to add a reference photo and a clip art version of what your shot should ideally look like. Using reference shots saves time when shooting, so if you have the option, always visit your locations and take photos that will match the relevant scenes before you begin to create a storyboard.



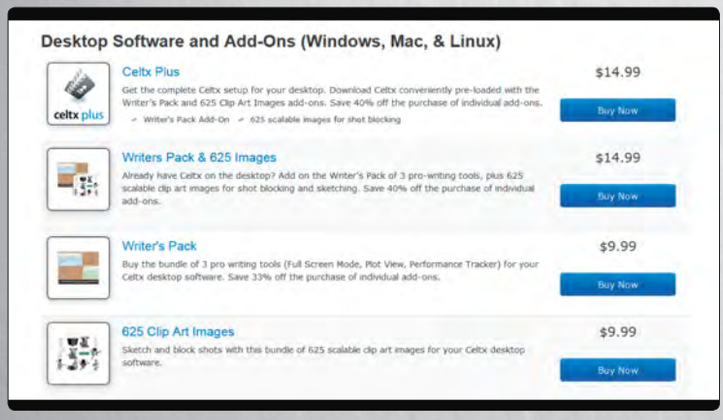


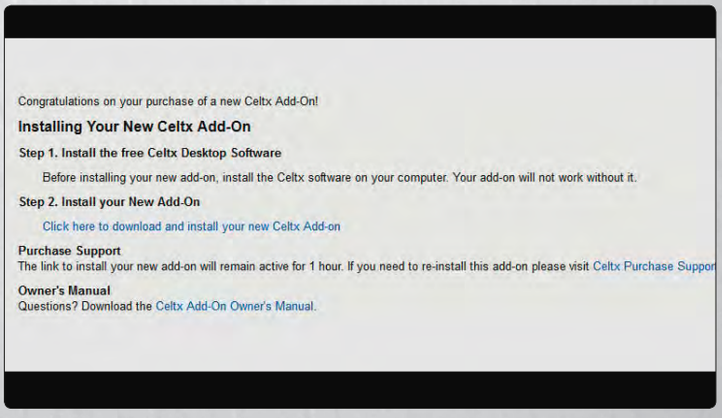
4 Creating the first shot...

Click Add Shot (A) to create an empty frame, then select the Shot Type from the menu (B). Click on the A/V Script tab and then in the Scenes menu, right click the scene 1.1 and select go to from the context menu. This will jump your cursor to the respective shot description. Highlight the text for this shot description and select Copy. Jump back to the Storyboard tab and Paste this into the description area (C).

5 Adding an image...

Click once on the words [Add Image] (the cursor will turn into a pointing finger when you have the mouse in the correct place). This will bring up a browser; use it to locate the photo or image that you would like to add. Select the photo and click Open to place it into the frame. Double-clicking on this image will open it in an image application, which is not required at the moment.



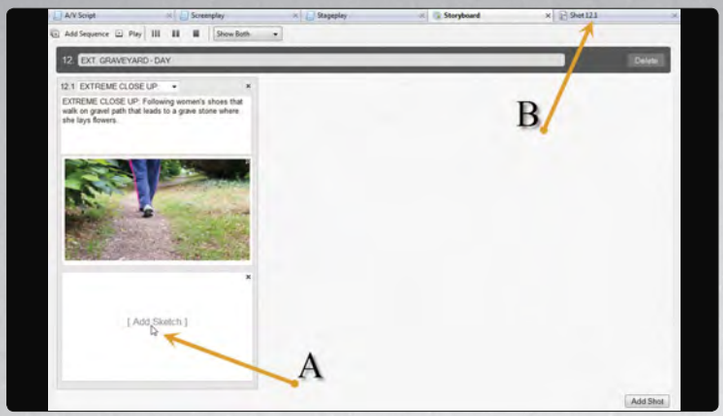


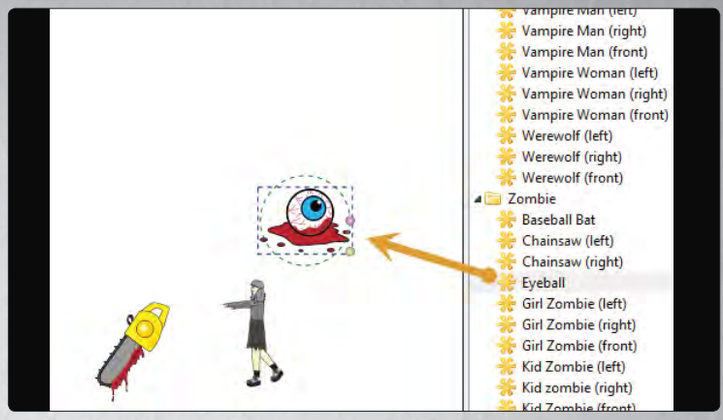
6 Purchasing storyboard assets...

Celtx comes with just five basic assets, including one male and female character, two types of lights and one camera. Clearly you are not going to be able to get very creative with this sparse collection, so it's worth considering expanding the options. Fortunately, a set of 625 clip art images costs just $9.99 and can be purchased directly from the Celtx website.

7 Installation and usage...

There's very little to be done in order to install and begin using the storyboarding assets. Simply follow the on-screen instructions in order to expand the capabilities of this practical application. Just remember to save and close your project before buying any Celtx add-ons because the application will need to be rebooted in order to correctly install them for use.



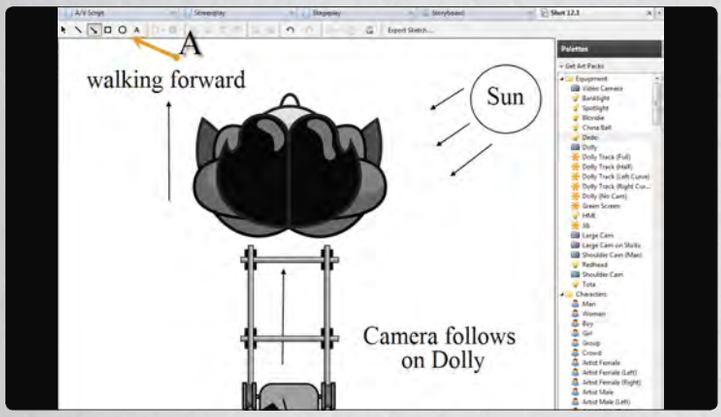


8 Opening the shots tab...

Re-launch Celtx and select your project from the quick menu or from the File menu once the application has finished loading. Make sure that the storyboard tab is the active one, then click once on Add Sketch (A) to open the Shot tab (B). If the Add Sketch wording is missing, try double-clicking in this area in order to bring up the Shot tab.

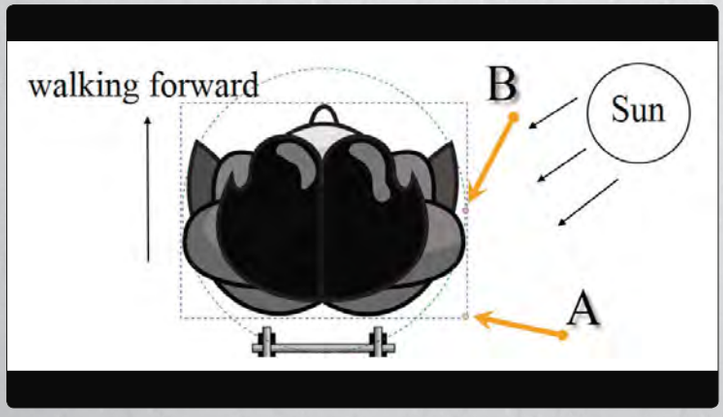
9 Adding assets to the shot area...

With the Shots tab open, you should now see your clip art images in the Palettes area. These will be listed under various folder names. Some aren't as logical as you would expect - characters and objects can be found under the Mad Scientist and Zombie folders. When you have suitable clips to represent your scene, drag and drop them into a central area of the screen.



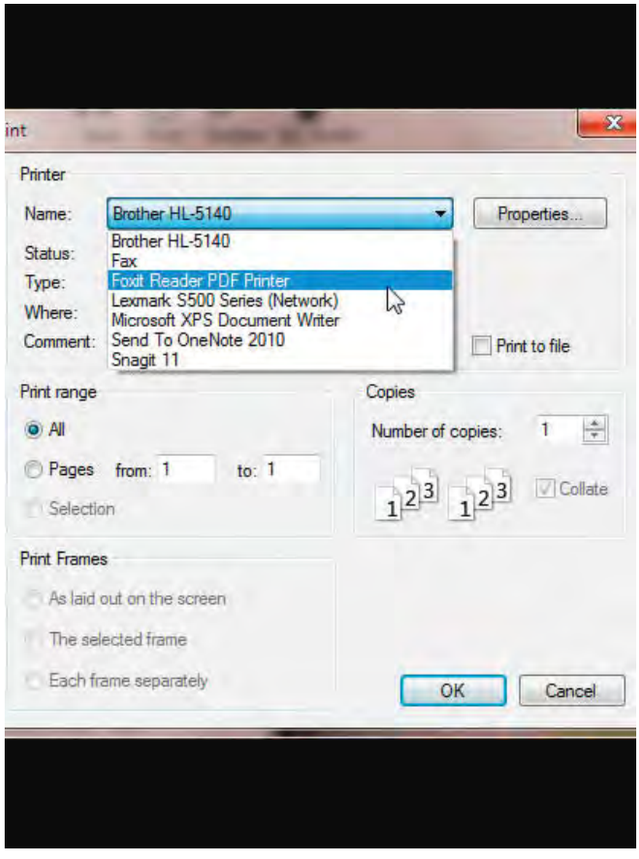
10 Decide on top-down or shot repro'...

Decide if you want to create a birds-eye view of the shot or a reproduction of the photo you inserted in step 5. Top-down is arguably the more useful as it shows camera and lighting positioning a little better, it also allows you to add notes, basic shapes (a circle here is used to represent Sunlight) and directional arrows (A) that make more sense when seen in 2D.



11 Resize and move assets...

Assets can be resized using the purple dot (A), rotated using the yellow dot (B) and using the mouse. Be sure to scale up the clip art to be much bigger than the default as this is tiny when displayed in the storyboard sketch panel. Press save to add your work to the storyboard sketch panel, if you don't press Save the sketch area will remain blank! Double click the sketch panel to re-edit.



12 Exporting your storyboard...

Celtx doesn't directly support the export of a storyboard, but you can get around this by simply printing the storyboard as a PDF. To do this, click File > Print, then select a PDF printer option from the list. If you don't have one on your computer, you should consider installing something like the free Foxit PDF reader. Once you have the PDF printer option selected, press OK and select where you would like the PDF to be saved. Happy storyboarding!



Dual sound audio workflows with Adobe Premiere Pro CS6

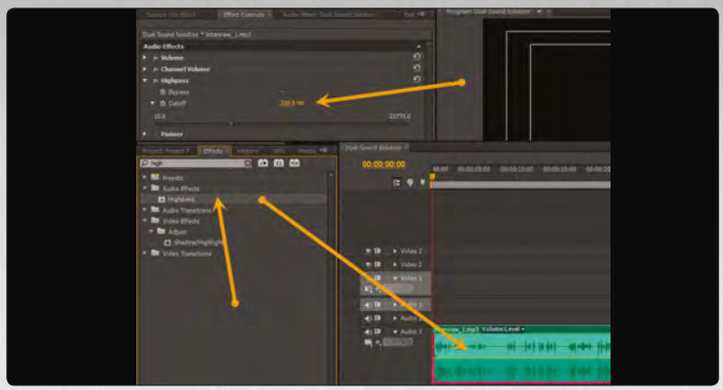
Getting the most from your audio using Premiere Pro with Paul Ekert, author of Mastering Adobe Premiere Pro CS6

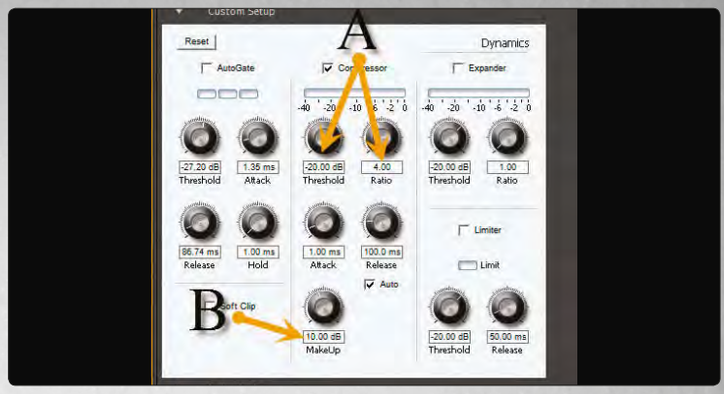
Working with a DSLR camera is wonderful; creative options open up and you begin to truly realise the imagery in your head. And then you come to the edit, only to find the sound from your beloved DSLR sucks. There's no getting around this, the DSLR does for sound what the Incredible Hulk does for ballet; it tramples all over it and leaves you with a mashed-up version of the original. To get around this, some filmmakers use a boom mic mounted to the DSLR's hotshoe, or they use an extension cable and a boom pole to move the mic nearer the subject (always the first rule for obtaining good sound). But, this still feeds the audio output from the boom mic into the relatively inferior audio circuitry of the DSLR. Not ideal really.

A better way to record sound is to use a dual sound solution, which means feeding the boom mic into an external sound recorder such as the cheap-as-chips Zoom H1. However, if you're a 'budget aware' filmmaker, you may also have bought one of the many cheap shotgun microphones on eBay. These microphones can pick up (or introduce) extra noise, they also tend to record the actual sound you did want to hear at a lower level than perhaps you might have preferred.

Before you start this tutorial, import your sound file into Premiere, add it to the timeline (use an audio track towards the bottom of the Timeline - Audio 3 for example), then play the clip back a number of times to identify the sound problems you need to fix. Once you've done that, move on to step 1 and see just how simple it is to enhance the quality of your audio and then match it up on the Timeline to achieve perfect audio sync using Premiere Pro CS6.





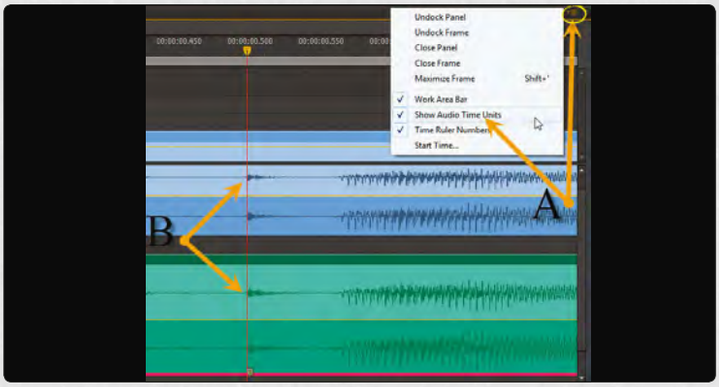


1 Removing background hum...

All mics pick up the sound of air conditioning or the wind blowing. Reduce the effect of annoyances by pressing Shift+7 to bring up the Effects panel and type High into the search bar. Drag and drop the Highpass effect onto the audio clip on your timeline and press Shift+5 to open the Effects Control panel. Dial open the properties for the Highpass effect and experiment with the range of values in the Cutoff setting. Start at around 200 and work your way up.

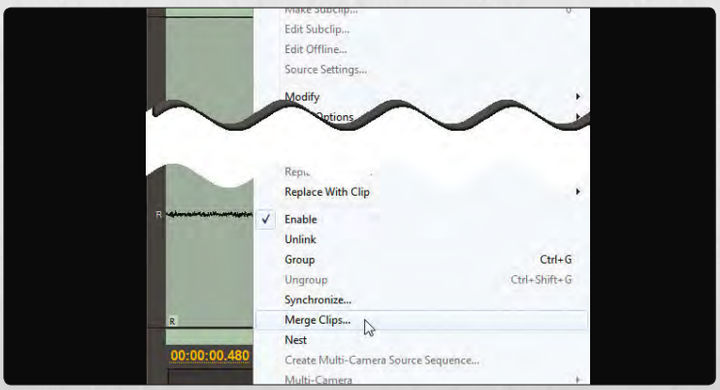
2 Increasing the volume...

There are a number of ways to increase volume, including going into the Audio Mixer panel (Shift+6) and dragging upwards the slider for that track. A more elegant solution is to use the Dynamics filter. Add this to your sound clip, dial open the Custom Setup parameters and adjust the Threshold value to around minus 20, Ratio to around plus 4 (A) and the MakeUp (B) (controls the actual increase of volume) to around plus 10. Playback and adjust settings to suit.



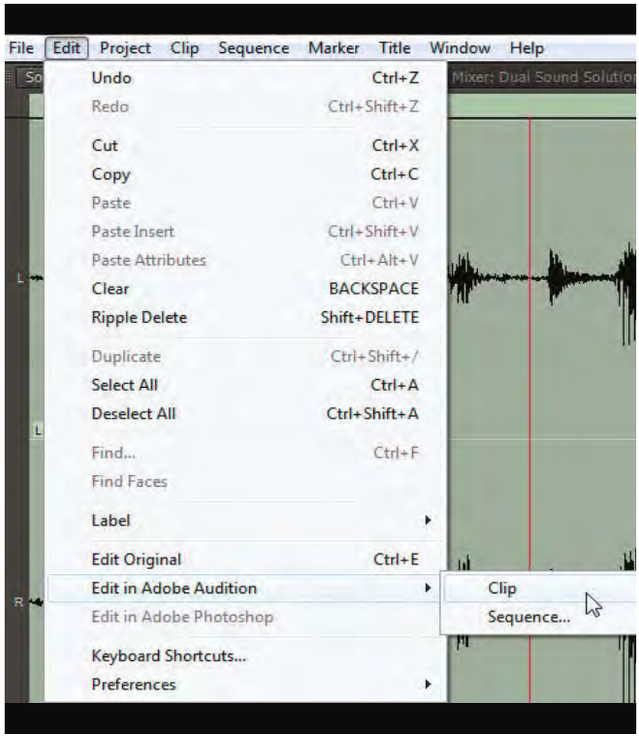
3 Synchronising the audio...

Import your video, add it to Video 1 and expand Audio 1 to show the wave form. Select Show Audio Time Units for the timeline by clicking the small icon indicated with arrow A and drag the separate audio file (not the video!) until the two wave files match. The Video and Audio on V1 and A1 can only be moved in steps that match the frame rate used, but the separate audio file can be dragged in much smaller increments when the Show Audio Time Units is selected. Always move the audio file, never the video!



4 Merging the clips...

With audio and video synchronised, you can create a merged clip to keep them together. This is accomplished by selecting each clip on the Timeline (click with Shift held down) and then right-clicking any of the selected clips and choosing Clip > Merge Clips… from the menu. This will create a new file with the tag Merged in your Project panel, which can be used to create a New Sequence.



5 Using additional software...

If you're using Adobe's Creative Cloud you may well have access to Adobe Audition, which contains a whole host of filters to fix a variety of vexing audio glitches. Audition can be accessed from the Premiere timeline, simply select the clip in the sequence you want to fix, then chose Edit > Edit in Adobe Audition > Clip to send a dynamically-linked version of that audio file to Audition. Any edits you make in Audition will be automatically sent back to the clip on the Premiere Timeline everytime you hit the save button. Further examples of getting the best from Premiere Pro can be found in Paul Ekert's book, Mastering Premiere Pro CS6, available from all good book stores.

A DESIGN FOR LIFE

The inside track on leading film marketing agency DGL Creative and its founder David Laird



You might remember our Danny Dyer interview a few issues ago, when we ran a cover with artwork from the forthcoming movie Vendetta. This artwork - and so much more - was the work of specialist film marketing designer David Laird and his company DGL Creative. Laird was a bona fide film buff and had been inspired and fascinated by movie poster art since childhood.

The big idea

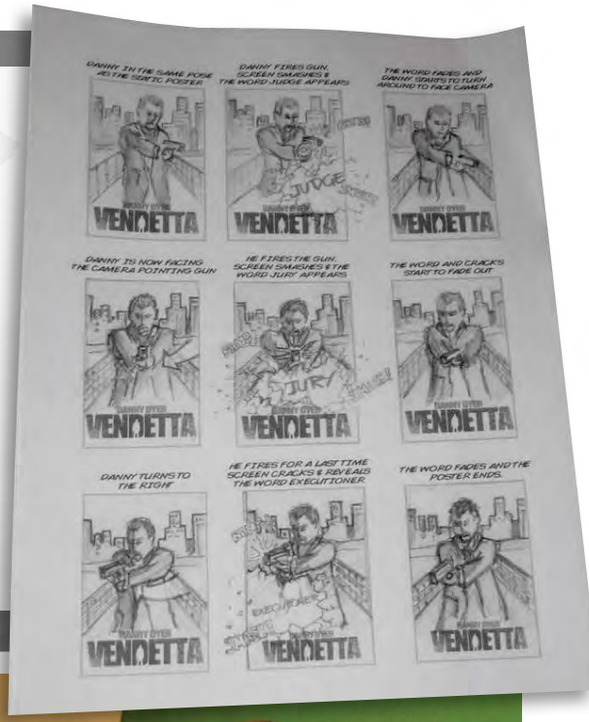
Laird was also a salaried graphic designer for some years, long before the concept for his company came along, as he explains: DGL Creative was an idea I had been brewing up for several years, but, as with most people, I was safe in my job and reliant on my salary to cover the usual: mortgage, bills and an extremely high-maintenance girlfriend. She'll kill me for saying that. I have always had a passion for movies and am an enormous admirer of iconic movie posters, so I knew this was the direction I wanted to go as a designer; I just didn't know how to go about getting there!

I knew I would have to take the plunge and go for it, but needed everything in place before I could leave my previous role. I spent a tedious year researching the industry, the companies I'd be up against and the quality and standards they were setting, but most importantly how filmmakers and producers went about sourcing artwork to promote their films. Studio quality artwork came with a studio quality price tag and this was often out of the grasp of most filmmakers and producers. So I wanted to change that and let every movie have a chance to promote itself, within their given budget. This is when I found my

MAKING A MARK

The hardest part was being taken seriously. I think anyone with pure talent and passion will prevail in the industry. Sometimes I look at some of the recent work we have done and think, 'Wow that only took a couple of hours to complete!'. Sometimes, the idea is much more effective than the design process and, if you can think of a great concept in your mind before even starting on the design, you're halfway there. Having an iPhone and a 'design' app doesn't mean you are the next big thing. Unfortunately, as we know very well from our recent job vacancy and the crazy amount of 'designers' portfolios we were sent.

David, however is the consummate professional as his portfolio testifies and his work ethic and skill began earning the respect of his clients: There is no way of making this sound like I'm NOT blowing the DGL trumpet here, BUT that's why we are in this business. We genuinely know what it takes to sell a movie. We know what looks cool, what works and what doesn't and, as movie fans, we know what would convince us to watch a movie. More importantly, we usually only need a brief chat with the filmmaker or producer, which then enables us to envision how the artwork should look for the film. Of course, our tastes will always differ slightly from our clients and we will work alongside them until they are happy but it's usually spot on within several minor revisions.



niche market and DGL Creative was born!

Getting the word out

Once David had taken the plunge and set up the business, the next challenge was making it known to the right people: The toughest part of setting up DGL was letting people know 'we' existed and getting a chance to prove what 'we' could do. People want to see previous work examples before trusting you, which was difficult for us as we hadn't yet got a movie portfolio. I think it came down to persistence and dedication as we kept plucking away at the production companies until they gave us a chance. And, although DGL is now a team of creatives, back then it was just me.

I used to email several ideas to production companies for their upcoming movies, without even having their permission and persisted until they took notice of me. Once I got one gig, the next soon followed and word soon got around. As the work comes in you feel more confident approaching clients for new work, as you have experience to back you up and this is all I did. It was a long road with lots of knocks on the way, but it improved me as a designer and I learned a lot about the industry.

Creative vision

Even once DGL was established, working on quality product in an industry packed with timewasters and fantasists was a challenge in itself: The hardest part of the job is producing artwork for a movie that has not started filming. This is now becoming more and more popular as producers and filmmakers want to showcase their upcoming movie on IMDB.


Danny Dyer works on promo shots



com or create a Facebook/Twitter page and they are aware that they need a quality poster or visual to give their film some credibility. This could be so that they can attract potential investors, recruit their production team or employ their cast - whatever the case may be, it helps to have an image to relate to the film and build up some buzz around it.

The reason this is so difficult is because we have no photos to work with, no movie to watch for inspiration and no actors to help us 'sell' the movie. We usually only have a synopsis and a producers vision to go by, so this is a real test of our creative abilities. Although this is the toughest job, it's possibly my favourite job, as we are playing a small part in the birth of the movie, slowly watching the filmmaker's vision develop into reality. That said, it's tough handing over our artwork to a distribution company so they can redevelop it to suit their marketing strategy. I've seen many cases in the past that a movie poster or DVD sleeve completely misleads the audience, just to sell a film. We



try to avoid that at all costs.

A new dimension

As part of their collaboration with Richwater on Vendetta, DGL created a number of character posters and this summer went a step further, designing the first ever motion poster for a British film. Laird recalls how this landmark came about: As complete movie buffs, we are always aware of what's hot and what's new in the industry. Every day we are inspired by new ideas, new techniques and we always want to push the boundaries of movie promotion. Over the past couple of years, the massive blockbusters in the US have been releasing these 'motion' posters to promote the movie online.

They are basically a modern take on the classic movie poster that you will see on billboards or in magazines (a moving poster if you like). The minute we released the static poster for Vendetta, I could visualise that exact scene but with Danny moving and firing the gun. The guys threw some storyboards together and we played with some ideas before proposing them to the producer. Once we had the vision in place, we got together in the studio with our buddies from Beard Vision (camera experts) to film Danny in several gun-swinging poses in front of a green screen. This was the easy part.

We then took the footage back to our studio and started with the task of bringing the original cityscape scenery to life.

THE POWER OF MARKETING

The Vendetta project particularly inspired and excited Laird and his growing team: I think the reason DGL were so on-board with this film and all of its marketing was purely because, it's a proper British film. I could probably count on one hand the amount of decent British flicks in the past five years. They are few and far between these days, excluding the likes of Skyfall, which had a mega-Hollywood budget; this was going back to basics and doing it very well.

When we watched the raw version of the movie, we knew they had something there instantly. The acting is top-notch from everyone involved, Stephen has done a great job with the directing and it helps to have a solid storyline. Danny Dyer has taken a lot of flack recently for some of his movie choices, but this movie was made for him and is easily his best work since Football Factory.



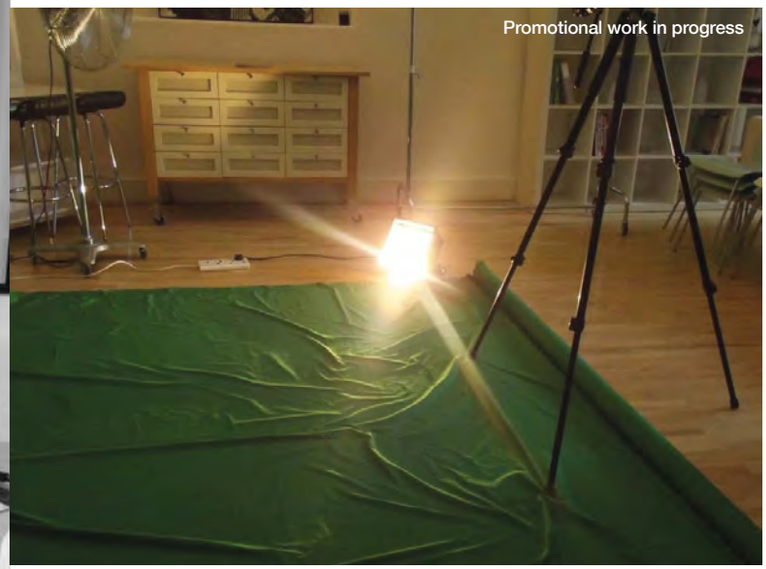
Throwing some shapes

MAKING A CONNECTION

After designing artwork for forthcoming 3D horror film Crypt, David was introduced to Jonathan Sothcott, in his capacity as Richwater Films boss: Very much like a romance movie, we fancied Jonathan (Richwater CEO) for a long time. We had our friends ask his friends if he was interested in us, it turned out he actually was. We went on a few dates and the rest is history as they say, ha! Jonathan then approached us with a project, which sounded right up our street, being Vendetta and starring Danny Dyer. We discussed the vision for the film and what they wanted to achieve, then set about producing some ideas for a teaser poster.

The original idea we had was a lot darker than the final artwork and more 'angry street thug' than 'trained SAS', so we got some full-length shots of Danny and went back to the drawing board. After a few more concepts, we both decided that the blue tones and city backdrop were perfect and would be used for all the marketing of the movie. Jonathan does makes our lives easier because he has a great eye for detail and is a man that knows what he wants. Sothcott is similarly gushing, if a little more concise, having stated that DGL is one of the most talented agencies in the country and working with them is a treat.





Promotional work in progress

because there have only been a handful of motion posters ever created and all of them have had multi-million pound budgets. So, putting ours out there to sit amongst others such as The Hunger Games, Wolverine and Star Trek was always going to be risky.

A different approach

Bold ideas such as the Vendetta motion poster are paying off and Laird is particularly proud of his work on the film: We loved working on the whole of the Vendetta movie, from the teaser poster to the website, but without a doubt the motion poster is a defining moment for us. The great thing about this was that we brought something which is now huge in America over to the UK, and have shown what can be achieved with tons of creativity, a small budget and group of like-minded people who want to achieve the best for their movie.

Jonathan and his team are

We had to add ripples and waves to the water - thunder, lightning and rain to the scene and had to consider things like the rain bouncing off the railings so it looked real. The toughest part was creating the gunshots and bullethole effects, as the main aim was to have the three shots with the words, Justice is Coming! Yet trying to do this and still look realistic was a very tough challenge.

After a few sleepless nights, we decided to have each word flash through the glass as it shattered, so we tried a few styles based on this idea and it all started to come together. We had a big task to live up to, knowing that this could be the first motion poster to come out of the UK, so we wanted to do the movie, Richwater and ourselves proud. We would effectively be putting our reputation on the line here,







always looking for creative ways to promote their movies and we are always looking to try new ideas, which is probably why we work so well together.

There have been a few more creations of late, which we are similarly proud about, some for Richwater that we are not allowed to discuss yet, but are very excited about. And, there are also a few over in the US and Australia. Our latest poster design was for upcoming horror movie The Ten O Clock People, which is an adaptation of a Stephen King short story. It stars Captain America's Chris Evans and is produced by the guys behind Fright Night and Child's Play, so we are very excited about this one and the artwork has gone down very well in the States. It also got the

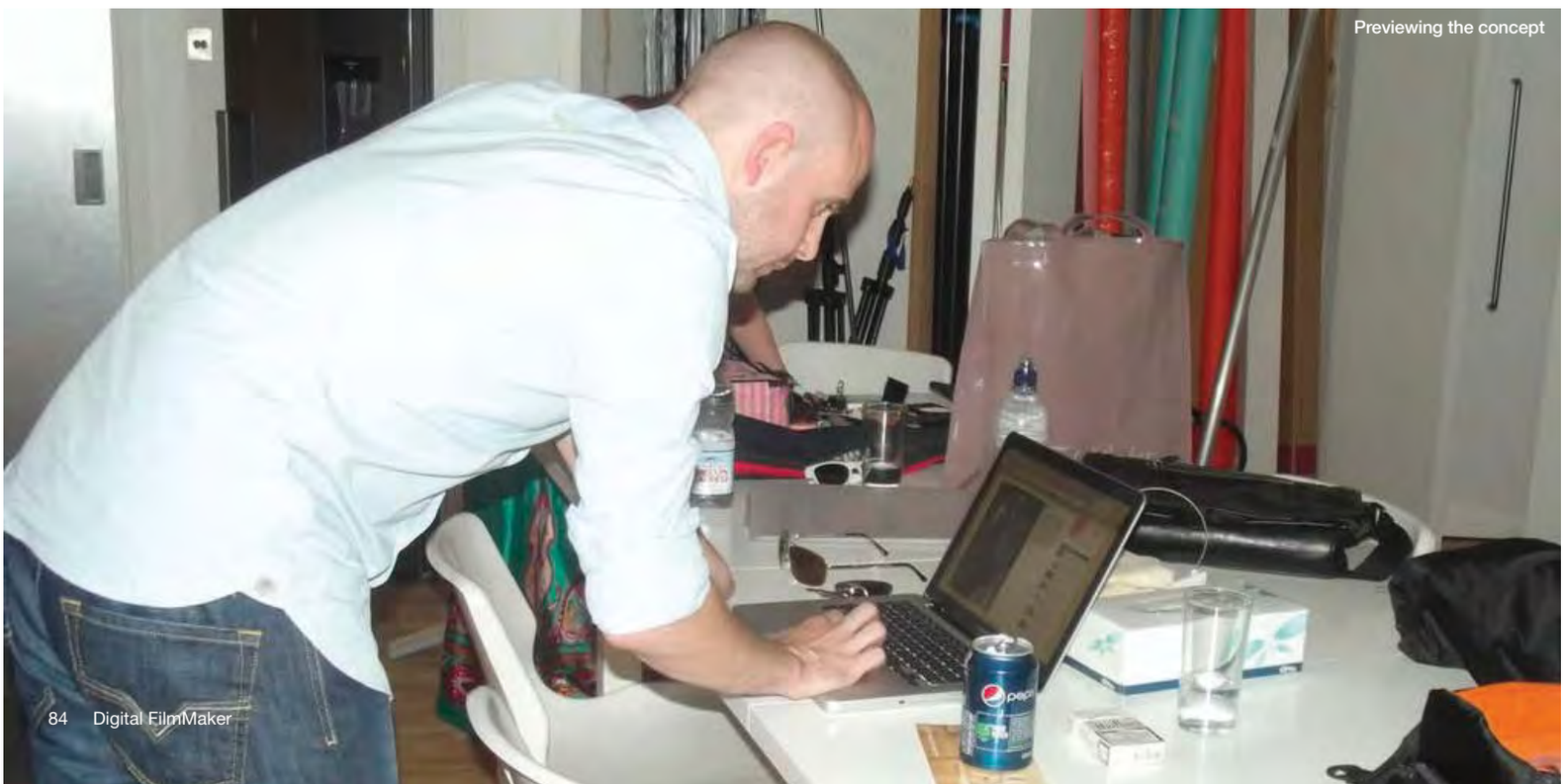


thumbs-up from Mr King himself, which was a nice touch for the effort we put in.

A bright future

And the future for DGL is looking particularly bright going into 2014 as he concludes: I am extremely excited about the future of DGL. We have just moved into a swanky new studio with a new filming set, specifically for motion posters, so that we are always one step ahead of the competition. I also like to think that I've finally got the perfect team together and everyone can grow with the technology and compliment each other in every aspect of movie marketing. We all thrive from innovation and creativity, and are currently working on some really ground-breaking technology, which we are hoping to launch in early 2014 that could further change the way we view movie posters. Watch this space! And therein lies the secret of David Laird's success: he makes spaces worth watching. ■

> **We all thrive from innovation and creativity, and are currently working on some ground breaking technology**



Previewing the concept

THE POSTERS THAT INSPIRE...

I always remember when I was kid and my parents would take me to Anne's Video Library (a local VHS hire store, long before Blockbuster was around) and being amazed by all of these images on the cover of the video tapes. I would go into this video store and know exactly what I wanted to watch, without even reading the back of them. I was sold on how the cover looked and even now, a good cover will make me pick it up and read on.

In those days, the video cover was almost the same design as the movie poster, and the one that stood out for me back then was Jaws. The artwork scared the hell out of me as a kid and the movie itself stuck with me and haunted my dreams for many, many, years…and it is still an all-time favourite of mine.

The posters I love range from the usual classics including Full Metal Jacket, Pulp Fiction and Silence of the Lambs, through to modern greats such as Human Centipede 2, Dark Knight Rises and Cloverfield. My all-time favourite poster based on the pure genius of it, has to be Hard Candy. It was created by the guys at Art Machine in America and I have to say that they are the people I admire most in this whole creative industry.

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

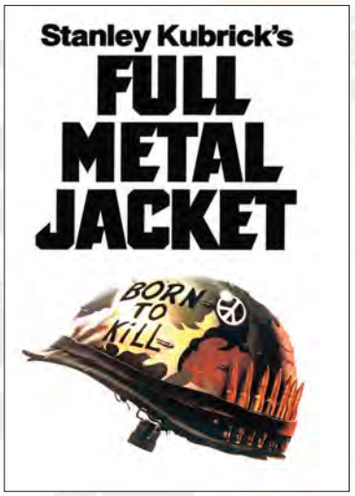
I love the serenity of this poster and what it represents in the film. It was a brave choice for a movie that will always be remember for its scenes of horror and two super villains in Hannibal Lecter and Buffalo Bill.



Cloverfield

An amazing piece of artwork here and a great example of the famous phrase 'A picture is worth a thousand words' - it's also a great use of such an iconic landmark to represent catastrophic impending danger.





Full Metal Jacket

I always remember this image as a kid and desperately wanting to see the movie, but never being allowed. It's one of those images that I can't explain why it's so cool, it just is. I never looked further than the soldier's hat as a kid, but now I see its representation is perfect and sums up the film a treat.



THE DARK KNIGHT

There were loads of different versions for this movie done by the big players in the industry, but the 'Why So Serious?' campaign was an awesome piece of advertising excellence.

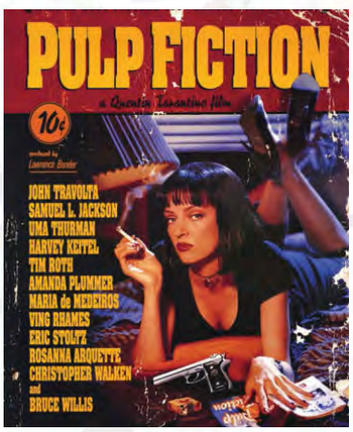


Human Centipede 2

Sick film, sick poster, great marketing!!

Pulp Fiction

I love most of the Tarantino poster designs and they are almost as important as his films for me. They all have a vintage look and feel about them, just like his movies. Pulp is the pick of the bunch.



Saw

This applies to the whole collection really as it started a whole new trend of horror movie posters. Something as simple as an amputated limb, or a few teeth, sum up everything about the movies and what awaits you. This style is so often copied, but never bettered.

JAWS

Simple, artistic, terrifying, breathtaking. This poster offers so much inspiration to me, and sets standards even to this day about how you promote a movie.



Hard Candy

Not the most famous film, but definitely worth a watch. This artwork is utter genius in every sense of the word. It's clever, it's powerful, it's intimidating and, more importantly, it represents the whole plot of the film in the most simplistic, artistic way.





Aaron Golden is a recent graduate and filmmaker who has filmed events, conferences and more while studying at the University of Plymouth

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

In my first year of university, I studied at the college I had done my BTEC at, as it was closer to home. Fortunately, although I was in the same place, I had access to more professional equipment and facilities, I used the TV studio and Gallery regularly as well as Canon XH-A1s, which was a nice move from the handycams I had previously used.

During the first year of university I did a lot of studio-based work including a live studio programme called Crime Time. I created a pre-recorded segment of a jet ski robbery for this and a local Sea Sports centre were nice enough to agree to let us stage the robbery there at night. It was one of those crime reconstruction witness







You Me At Six, University of Plymouth Summer Ball 2013

appeal videos. I also learnt to operate the sound and vision mixer and autocue throughout this live show.

I also travelled to Paris during my first year, to film a Parisian graffiti documentary, which was used as a pre-recorded segment in a live show we did called Porquoi. This turned out great and we each split into groups, with a different chosen subject, then used Google maps for location recces as none of us were familiar with the area. We soon realised that Monmartre and Belleville were two of the places that would be best to document so we set out for those, using the underground, to travel to those and various other locations. We travelled with journalism students as well, so we were able to have a professional presentation to things. I wrote a script for the presenter and we also managed to get an interview with a local street artist. The only issue was we were told to be careful using tripods when we were filming because it could be seen as professional filming and trying to make money and therefore we could get moved on, even if we explained we were students. Thankfully, we didn't run into any problems with this and were able to film everything fine.

Second year

In my second year, I collaborated with a Topsham based folk musician called Max Juraczyk. It was the first music video I had done and I wasn't too familiar with Topsham or the process of creating a music video, but I planned things out as meticulously as I could and met with him to discuss locations and the theme before filming. On the day, we started filming in the morning at about 8:30 and walked by foot to various places around Topsham itself, lugging the equipment around. I got some great shots, including one of a small wooden pier and reeds at the start, while other shots were planned and some were more sporadic, but they all worked well together. Syncing was something I had worried about, but it worked out well, playing Max's track from the laptop so he could match the pace with the vocal and acoustic guitar. In hindsight, I should have used some portable speakers, but back then I did not have any so I had to make do with the resources available. As we walked and got each shot, time inevitably progressed and so we ended up incorporating a day to night progression in the film, which worked well.

I also had a collaboration with Central Washington University, which unfortunately did not turn out to plan. I pitched a treatment, which was eventually chosen to develop with CWU and shoot in England, Prague and the USA, co-scripted and filmed by me and an American student. I filmed footage using my GoPro camera in Prague, but unfortunately I never received the American footage and was eventually told due to their education system structure, the class now had changed completely. The film revolved around a narcoleptic man that wakes up in different places in different countries, with no idea how or why and finding himself on the run from murders that have been set up for some reason and trying to find who is manipulating him. Although the film was never



Footage check for Visiting Hour

> **In film it's all about the portfolio. Although I didn't get the grades I wanted to, I think I learned a lot**


Cuppa TV launch day




Stepping in to operate the boom mic on Visiting Hour

finished I sort of I think that it has definitely helped me and I plan to use elements of the story in a script I'm currently writing.

Third year

For my final year of university, I decided that I should try and buy as much equipment as I could so I wouldn't have to travel in to book equipment, worry about taking it back late or deal with all the equipment being booked out, which could happen if things were close to a deadline. I bought a Canon 550D, Glidecam HD 2000, Battery pack, DSLR mini jib/crane and a Rotolight so I could avoid these problems and practice using my equipment when possible.

I filmed a local artist video with Plymouth based artist Amy Eaton, as well as documenting the biggest student event of the year at the university; The Summer Ball 2013 and a 360 Degree Film Conference and exhibition with international speakers talking about the potential of the technology. I edited the artist video on Final Cut Pro 7 and also got to grips with using a plug-in called Magic Bullet Looks to colour grade the footage. This led to me working on a French web comedy series that I am currently colour grading for a client.

The 550D really makes a difference in terms of practicality, it takes up hardly any space compared to the XH-A1s I had used and using multiple SD cards plus a laptop and hard drive on site at the conferences meant that both me and the other two team members from my class had a quick and efficient workflow going. So, if one of us ran out of memory or battery (in one case, my camera overheated from filming for so long), another camera was always rolling whilst we sorted things out and I used my GoPro camera to capture a time-lapse of the speakers and guests arriving. It was also good to work in such a professional environment.

A great opportunity

The Summer Ball was unpaid, but gave me the opportunity to film from the press pit, which was great and I used my Glidecam to get some good shots of Katy B and You Me At Six. Being limited only to a 50mm lens was a bit of a challenge when using the Glidecam, so I made a makeshift pull focus from some cable ties but this still proved to be a challenge. Overall it turned out great and after some event photography and filming, the rest of the team and I were able to leave our equipment in an office and enjoy the rest of it.

I think some people seem to get the idea of university all wrong. They think it's some kind of ticket to a job once they have their degree in the bag. But I heard something recently, which sounds about right. It said a degree is like icing on the cake and without anything else it doesn't look good at all. In film it's all about the portfolio. Although I didn't get the grades I wanted to, I think I learned a lot. I have learned to be creative with my job searches and not put all my eggs in one basket, convinced I would get the one or two jobs I had applied for. I have started using a multitude of jobsites such as Internships.co.uk, Go Think Big, Ideas Tap Film and TV Pro and LinkedIn, which have all proved useful and I was recently offered a place at a film bloggers workshop run by Ideas Tap and the Film Distributors Association.

Work in progress

Since finishing University I've also filmed a short on the theme of betrayal. More than anything this was to help build a network. The film was good, but I'm now working with the same two actors and director plus a new actress on a much better script. I figured the best way to make films is to go out and do them, instead of just procrastinating. Obviously, the better planned a project is then better it will be, but I think sometimes I end up over planning and over complicating things instead of making those films and learning how to make better content each time. This is what that film was, a simple two room

(and hallway) film with a couple of actors on board.

The script I am working on at the moment is about gangsters on the surface, but has another story intertwined, which inolves quantum physics and the ability to replay a scenario in a different way. I want to create something interesting and intelligent, but also accessible - as much as I love films like the Terminator and Die Hard, action films overall don't interest me nearly as much as the movies you see and you're like 'Wait, what happened?'. Then you watch it a second time and understand it better, like Inception, Brick and Primer (well, I still don't entirely understand that film). When I was in college, I saw Brick... and it made me think a lot. Its use of noir devices and unexpected, anachronistic vernacular gave things an interesting twist and the pacing is nothing short of brilliant.

Work experience

I also recently finished working as a production assistant on a short crowd funded film. It was great to be a part of the production process on that, and it really gave me an insight into how a professional production happens. I was basically the runner, so I fetched a lot of teas and coffees, I learnt that there are a few useful things a runner should have (I have since downloaded a runners handbook PDF) such as sticky notes, a pen, cable ties and a sharpie. I was getting about 20 coffees and teas that were all made differently and the cups could not be written on, so the sticky notes were invaluable, as was a crate to carry them and some card to weigh down the papeprowk is a good idea too.

I nearly had the stickies fly off the cups, which would have been a nightmare - mixing up the drinks! Small stuff, but it's all important. The cable ties, I always keep those on me now as a makeshift pull focus (it works surprisingly well). There was a shot where Danny Cooke, the cinematographer, was moving the Sony Exmor Camera on a Glidetrack and trying to keep focus with a Canon 50mm 1.4 as he was moving it (quite a challenge). It was taking a few shots, so I suggested the cable tie idea, which worked perfectly. On one day of the week-long shoot, the boom operator turned up a few hours late, so I took on the responsibility of this as well as my runner duties, until he appeared. The production went smoothly and we even finished a day ahead of schedule.





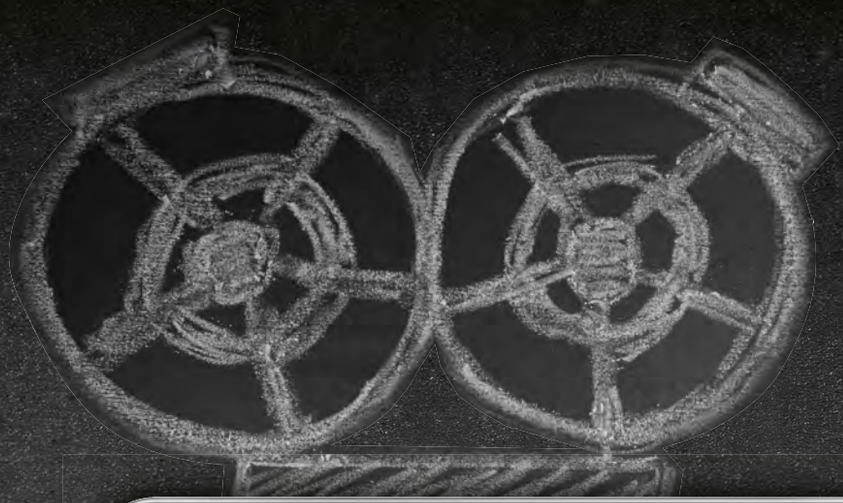
The old building used for Visiting Hour



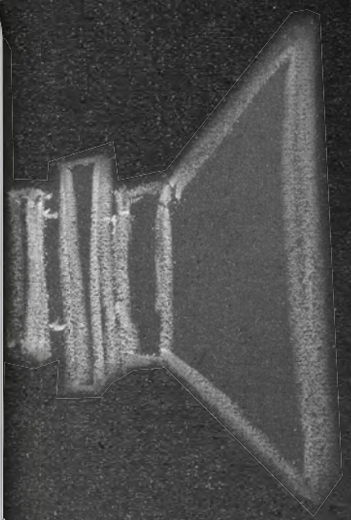
Working on the set

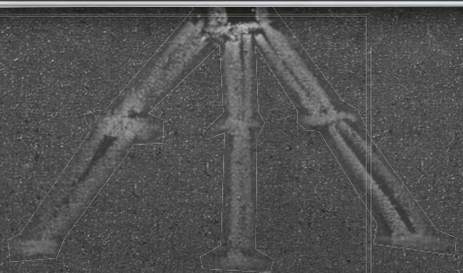
The next move

I'm currently looking for jobs and internships up in London. There don't seem to be many opportunities in Devon. I didn't think it would be easy, but it's much more difficult than I imagined. I'm still deciding whether I want to specialise in cinematography or scriptwriting and am considering applying to Goldsmiths University next year. I also plan to buy a full frame sensor camera, such as a Canon 5D MK II (a MK III would be ideal but the MK II seems to be good enough with the right lens), some really sharp glass for it and some Final Draft software. At the moment I use Celtx, but I want to try the industry standard. ■









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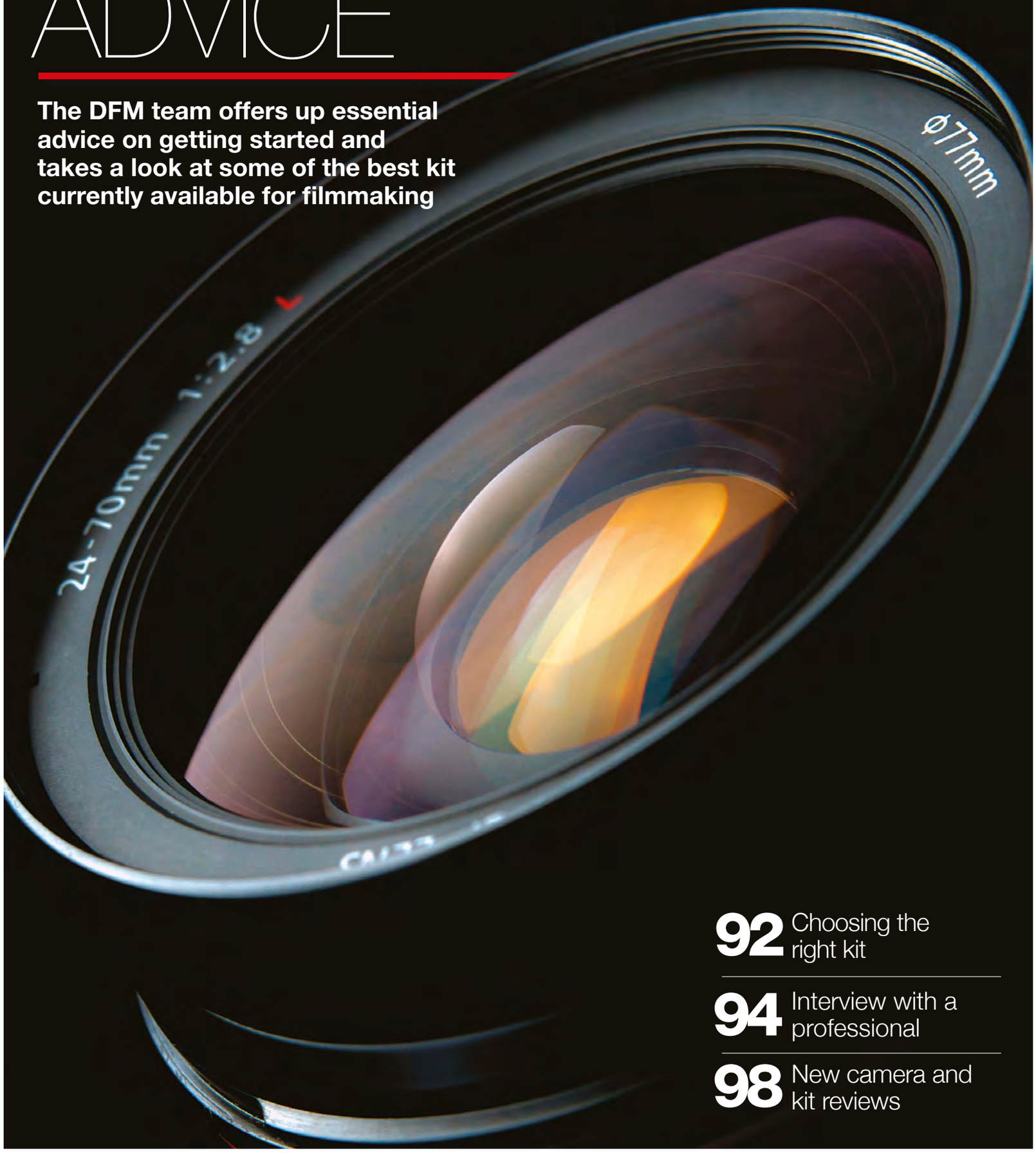
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HARDWARE ADVICE

The DFM team offers up essential advice on getting started and takes a look at some of the best kit currently available for filmmaking



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SHOOTING VIDEO WITH A DSLR
CHOOSING THE RIGHT KIT

As a filmmaking beginner, it can be tricky to know what kit you need to shoot professional videos. So, before we look at the hardware, we'll give you an overview of what you'll need and hear how a professional filmmaker gets his job done





High-quality video production tools have become hugely accessible over recent years. With the development of new technology, even the low-end kit can rival some of the professional equipment of years gone by. Although achieving a professional level of video production depends on a sizeable amount of skill and experience, having the resources to hand that allow you to test these skills requires an initial investment in crucial recording equipment.

Capturing HD video with a DSLR is relatively cheap compared to the high-quality video cameras of several years ago, and in the right hands, they can even rival cinema-quality cameras. However, with the growing market and countless resources both on and offline, it can be difficult to decipher where your money can best be spent.

As with most areas of modern technology, cameras are forever changing. With new specification sheets and better features being developed all the time, they can become old news very rapidly. It is, therefore, very common for your DSLR to be the first item on your kit list to be replaced, whereas lenses and other accessories can last almost forever.

Lenses

Acquiring quality lenses is just as important as your camera choice, and many would argue even more so. High-end lenses will likely outlive most of the equipment and accessories in your arsenal, including your DSLR. Lenses are also relatively timeless, meaning that no matter how far technology progresses, they will always be able to produce top-quality video.

Most serious videographers will also argue that the best optics for shooting video are prime lenses. Prime lenses are those that do not zoom, but simply have one fixed focal length. Prime lenses also generally produce a cleaner, higher quality picture, as well as having the advantage of a fixed wide aperture. The 50mm prime lens, for example, is one of the most popular lens options available. It has a focal length that is thought of as a 'normal' lens, because it provides an image comparable to that of the human eye. All of the manufacturers offer a 50mm prime lens, which, although it equates to more than the stated 50mm length on crop sensor cameras, provides a great and highly practical place to start your new filmmaking journey.

However, depending on the subjects you're trying to shoot, a zoom lens may well be your perfect companion. There is a huge selection out there to choose from, with some being more suited to shooting video than others, and all coming in at varying qualities and price points. Typically, zoom lenses don't have the benefits of a fast aperture, and most of the beginner level lenses have a variable aperture throughout the zoom range. That said, a zoom lens with a large selection of focal lengths will allow you to play with the field of view and give you all the flexibility over composition that a prime optic simply can't.

Audio

The sound of your video is arguably as important as the footage you're capturing. Unfortunately, the built-in microphone within DSLRs should only really be reserved for emergencies. Luckily, there is an extensive range of alternatives for capturing high-quality audio.

For the videographer recording on the move, a simple external microphone plugged into your DSLR is a great option. Even the most basic of external microphones will be better equipped to remove unwanted background noise and capture crisp and clear sound more effectively from your subject.

For those who have more control over where their audio is coming from, potentially where the events being filmed have been pre-determined or scripted, using an external audio recording device is a popular method to call upon. The recorder can be placed anywhere away from your camera, and the separate audio file can then be synced with the video footage in post-processing.

Stability

Second to audio and video quality for those serious about capturing the best possible video is stability. A smooth and seamless video can be the difference between a professional looking movie and an amateur clip.

There's a huge selection of stability options out there designed to meet the needs of every videographer, whether you're going for a dynamic shot, remaining static, or chasing your subject across a wide open scene.

You'll also find endless accessories that can be attached to your kit list too, from extra lenses to lighting kits and advanced camera rigs. Although most of these aren't necessary items to get you started on your videography journey, they'll soon become everyday items that play a part in adding professional production value to your movies. ■

Interview with a Pro

Brett Harvey is a filmmaker based in Cornwall and Weekend Retreat, his first feature film, was shot using a DSLR and on a shoestring budget. Digital FilmMaker finds out about his kit choices plus past and future projects...



What's your latest project about?

Weekend Retreat is a low-budget comedy thriller set in an isolated house in Cornwall starring Esther Hall, Dominic Coleman, Simon Harvey, Dean Nolan and Dudley Sutton. It's also my debut feature film as a writer and director. Because of the low budget we had to shoot the film in 12 days, with an extremely tight schedule and a shit-hot first assistant director (take a bow Ian Bucknole). After making shorts and music videos for 10 years, I knew I wanted to step up and make my first feature film. The trouble was, any idea I'd sit down to write would turn out too expensive. Being based in Cornwall means funding for projects can be scarce, so I knew anything I made would have to be low-budget in nature. I sat down and wrote myself a set of writing rules, ways to keep the film achievable - mostly it was tips I'd picked up from making short films;

One main location

A unit move really can kill a schedule. With Weekend Retreat, I knew I had to find an interesting location and keep the story contained there. In Cornwall, we have a great number of second homes and holiday cottages. During the winter months these houses sit completely empty. I remember thinking that anything could happen in one of them and nobody would be any the wiser, which immediately made me think it would be a good setting for either a horror or a thriller. The one drawback of setting a film in a single location is that the location then becomes a character in itself. Therefore, the perfect casting of that character becomes crucial to the whole project.



Cast and crew talk through a shot

LIMIT THE NUMBER OF CHARACTERS

When shooting with low or no budget you want to try and limit the number of people on set. The more people around the more mouths there are to feed, petrol expenses to deal with and fees to pay. Obviously there are people you need on a set in the crew, so one way of limiting numbers is to work with a small cast. A great by-product of this is you can't be lazy when writing characters - you have to flesh them out, really pin down what motivates them, what makes them (hopefully) believable.

SET PREDOMINANTLY INDOORS

A pretty simple one this - we live in the UK, so the one thing you can guarantee when filming exteriors is it'll rain! Even if you shoot at the height of summer, as soon as you get the camera out of the bag, it will rain. We didn't have time in our schedule to wait for the weather. If you shoot indoors you can control the light, control the sound, the cast and crew are warm. We still had scenes set outside (and, yes, it did rain) but by limiting the number of these scenes I know I'm giving us a fighting chance of getting the film shot.



Set over a short period

This way of working has more to do with the internal story logic of Weekend Retreat, because the film is basically about two sets of people trapped in a house. It therefore stretches believability the longer the period of time it's set over. Again, this was a good way of forcing myself to develop the story and the characters. The film is set over a day and a night and once we're in the house I don't cut to a B story or anything, we stay with each couple and watch the story develop around them. Once they're trapped in the house, what keeps them there? The producers (Simon Harvey and Denzil Monk) and I spent months working out the logic in the film.







The Weekend Retreat crew



Dominic Coleman as Duncan

Keep it short and tight

Audiences are so cine-literate these days and I didn't have the luxury of reshoots to fix story problems after we wrapped. We (the producers and I) had to be sure that the script was tight, that every scene /line/word was necessary to the story. The reality of working with a small budget is, every decision you make is motivated by the schedule and therefore lack of money. By day 2 of the shoot we shot 56 set-ups in two and a half hours - because we had to! The shooting style, the production design, the lighting was all motivated by the schedule. When I sat down to write the film, I knew this would be the case, so I knew that every bit of the film had to be justified. I had to keep every scene focused, make sure the structure was watertight and the logic sound (internal story logic is the bane of my existence!).

I spent 18 months developing the script with the producers. We then shot the film in 12 days on a Canon 5D in the summer of 2010. We had a long post-production process (18 months) in which time we test screened the film in village halls around Cornwall (this was part of our funding agreement). These test screenings really helped us with the shape of the final film. It's so handy to be

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS BUT CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Through making so many short films and, crucially, being able to screen them for audiences (I run a short film night in Cornwall called Roughcut) I've been able to work out what my strengths and weaknesses are as a writer and director. I naturally veer towards comedy (albeit of a dark nature), so I knew whatever I wrote I wanted it to have a comedic element. I also knew I wanted the film to have a dark, violent edge to it. While writing Weekend Retreat I was heavily influenced by filmmakers like the Coen brothers or Sam Raimi. What I admire about them is how close they tread the line between comedy and violence. Something like Fargo, for example, which is laugh out loud funny yet the violence is real and the stakes are high.



The Coen Brothers were influential

My first draft of the script was too comedic and too arch. I clearly remember have a script meeting with Si and Denzil and one of them saying that they just didn't care about the characters. This was such a revelation for me because I realised that I didn't care for my characters. If you're making a low-budget feature, the reality is you're going to be working on it for years. You've got to love your characters, because you're going to live with them for so long! Redrafting the script was less about story, more about exploring the characters and just fleshing them out.


The location



able to watch it with an audience, see what moments work and what needs more thought. Since completing the film in late 2011 it's been screened at national and international film festivals and picked up the Golden Chough at the Cornwall Film Festival, Best Writer/Director at the London Independent Film Festival along with Best Film and Best Actress at the Bootleg Festival Edinburgh.

So what projects are you currently working on?

Since completing Weekend Retreat I've been concentrating on developing the next feature film script. I've also been directing music videos for artists including Luke Toms, Emily Barker & The Red Clay Halo and the band Black Books. I also help to run a short film evening in Cornwall, the aforementioned Roughcut, which is dedicated to screening short films (and which, incidentally, is free for anyone to enter and all of the details can be found by heading to the website over at www.dogbitefilmcrew.com/events)

How do you go about getting your projects off the ground?

I'm incredibly lucky in Cornwall to be surrounded by such a fantastic team of people to work with, from Morgan Lowndes (the DoP on Weekend Retreat), to all the talented people at Dogbite Film Crew. I know that whenever a project comes up there's the right team of people to work with on my doorstep. In terms of funding, that's always going to be tricky for filmmakers in this country. With Weekend Retreat I got a tiny bit of funding through a scheme set up in Cornwall called Feast. It wasn't specifically a film funding pot I applied to, but rather a scheme to rurally tour screenings to village halls around Cornwall. I applied with the idea of touring the film while it was still in a rough state and then gauge feedback from the audiences, which was basically a way of opening up the post-production process. I guess this is a roundabout way of saying, look further than the 'traditional' ways of funding. There are a couple of schemes out there that you might be able to apply to that aren't necessarily about film funding.


Brett Harvey directs

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE KIT SET-UP FOR YOUR FILMING?

On Weekend Retreat, Morgan and I fell in love with an 85mm 1.2 lens. It was our first real time working with a Canon 5D after years of struggling to get that cinematic look with lens adaptors and what have you. That lens just made the close-ups absolutely beautiful. However, because we were shooting handheld it really put the pressure on Ben Jones (our brilliant focus puller).

DO YOU LIKE TO SHOOT LIGHT, OR TAKE TIME WITH A LARGE SET-UP?

It all depends on the project and sadly the time available. Shooting big drama set-ups are preferable as good lighting can really add an extra dynamic for the film. However, there normally isn't as much time as you'd like to set this up. On Weekend Retreat, Morgan and I devised a system with our gaffer (Dave Clark, who has sadly passed away since the shoot) where, while we were shooting in one room of the house, we had just enough kit for Dave to rig the next room we'd be shooting in. This was instrumental on keeping us to schedule. Dave was kind of a wizard that way, immensely talented, a true gent and a joy to work with. He is very much missed.




Esther Hall as Karen



Is there one piece of kit you couldn't have shot the film without, be it a specific camera, lens stabiliser and so on?

We mostly begged and borrowed our kit for the shoot. The one thing we hired in was a wireless follow focus. The whole film was shot with a Canon 5D on a shoulder mount, so it very much had that loose shooting style. By having the follow focus wireless, it meant we didn't have anything interfering with the camera while takes were going on. The only drawback was that it made lens changes slightly more complicated, but Ben and Kristian (Butler, our camera assistant) got lightning-quick at them by the end of the shoot.

Did you encounter any kit limitations while shooting?

We were all pretty new to DSLR shooting at that point, so ran into rolling shutter nightmares a couple of times. I wanted quite few whip pans, but they're incredibly difficult to do with the 5D. There's also a scene in the film that's set on the doorstep, where two characters are opening and closing the front door. The rolling shutter really affected the straight line of the doorframe which, of course, you don't really notice while filming the scene. I think there was a little post-production fixing on that one!

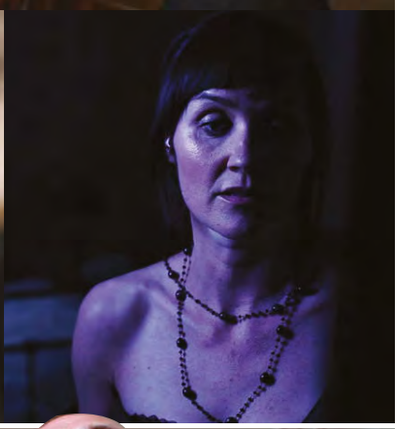
So is there one piece of kit you really want to add to your set-up, something that will take your projects to the next level, or simply make life a little bit easier?

Technology develops so quickly. It's frustrating, because if we were to shoot Weekend Retreat now on the same budget, we'd be able to use a RED camera, but just a couple of years ago that was way out of our price range. When the film screened at the Bootleg festival, someone in the audience couldn't believe it was shot on a 5D. They were convinced it was on the RED. Morgs was really stoked when he heard that!

Is there anything new on the horizon kit-wise that you're eager to get your hands on?

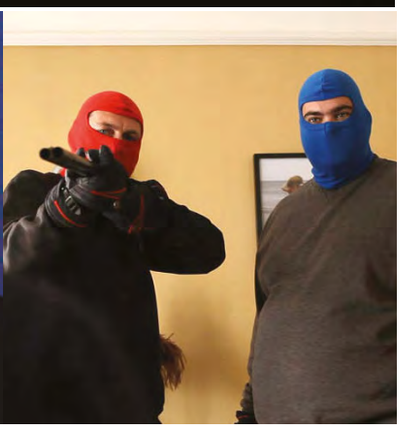
I'd absolutely love to get my hands on a Movi rig. It'd be great to have a play and see what kind of amazing shots you could get with that. I recently produced a short (RVG) for Ian Bucknole, which demanded quite a frenetic shooting style. The fun of filming that was inventing our own mini camera rigs, including strapping a GoPro to a radio-controlled car, crafting a makeshift stedicam rig on a skateboard. It's great fun to have a few challenges like that, where you have to find your own workaround for things and force yourself to be creative. ■











NEW KIT REVIEWS

SAMYANG 8MM F/3.5 FISHEYE LENS

A wallet-friendly fisheye lens from this often overlooked underdog brand

Samyang is not a particularly well-known brand and to some it may come as quite a shock to realise that they actually produce some truly fantastic equipment aimed at the professional on a budget. They're most well-known for their lens line-up, an area of the market that they share with other brands such as Rokinon, Pro-Optic and Bower. They've been around for years too, but have recently gained some excellent press due to some of their recent offerings, most notably the 85mm f/1.4 lens.

Meanwhile, the 8mm f/3.5 CS Fisheye is one of the latest offerings branded with the Samyang name and is designed for use with APS-C sized DSLR cameras. However, it is worth noting that it can also be used on Full Frame cameras, but with some of the integrated hood being visible in this image, it isn't advised.

Like all Samyang lenses, the 8mm Fisheye has no electronics, which means you won't just have to control the focus manually but also set the aperture. This can be cumbersome with some stills shooting, but for videographers it should be second nature, making this lens an excellent buy for those who can't justify spending big bucks on kit.

VERDICT

Many will be wary of putting a relatively cheap, third-party lens onto their camera with the hope of getting high-quality shots. However, if previous Samyang lenses are anything to go by, the 8mm Fisheye should prove to be incredibly sharp and full of contrast. The build quality of the lens is undeniably top-notch. It's not made of cheap plastic - the body is actually constructed from metal and the focus ring is nicely dampened to give you a real quality feel.

Price £284.99
Web www.samyang-lenses.co.uk





ROKINON 16MM T/2.2 CINE LENS

This budget wide-angle lens is aimed firmly at money conscious enthusiast videographers

Rokinon is another lesser-known brand name for lenses and other photography and video accessories. The lenses they market are essentially re-branded by themselves, and are identical to those produced under the names of Samyang, Pro-Optic and Bower. The company has recently announced this 16mm T/2.2 prime cine lens, designed for use on crop sensor cameras. It is available in Nikon F, Canon EF, Micro Four Thirds, Pentax, Samsung NX, Fujifilm X plus Sony A and Sony E mounts, meaning you can get your hands on this budget lens no matter what system set-up you're using.

As you'd expect from a video-dedicated prime lens, the 16mm offers focus and aperture racks for use with cinema rigs, doing away with the manual focus ring more commonly found on lenses. It also features step-less aperture control and calibration in T-stops rather than F-stops. Although simply a rehoused DSLR optic, the cine lens goes a long way to providing videographers with a low-light, wide-angle prime lens solution.

VERDICT

You'd be forgiven for thinking these re-branded lenses base their sole appeal around the price point. Although they are very competitively priced, that's not all they have going for them. This 16mm cine lens offers everything you'd want from a prime optic and helps to produce some excellent results. So, for those starting out in the video world, or even professionals who are trying to keep the purse strings tight, the Rokinon 16mm offers an extremely appealing package overall.

Price $499
Web www.rokinon.com

PR-1 PRIME VIDEO SHOULDER RIG KIT

A shoulder rig and gun-stock stabiliser in one simple design



The Prime video shoulder rig kit is a stable base from which to mount your shooting kit. Designed to be used as a two-handed shoulder offering, it can be stabilised against your body in a number of ways by simply adjusting the shoulder pad. This allows you to either rest the weight on your shoulder or brace against it. The PR-1 features an industry standard 15mm rail system. That means it allows any number of shooting accessories to be mounted and configured to suit your shooting style.

There are a variety of simple design features that make the PR-1 kit an easy to use set-up. The red tightening screws are easy to spot when your eyes are busy somewhere else, and they make adjusting your set-up very straightforward. The long handles will also make for a more comfortable carrying position, ensuring you don't have to raise your arms too high and thereby reducing fatigue during longer shoots.

VERDICT

The PR-1 kit is an affordable stabilisation system, offering everything you need to get going with a customisable and progressive shoulder rig. It can be easily converted from a shoulder mount to a gunstock-style chest mount, allowing you to brace your set-up to keep those shots nice and smooth. The neat design makes it quick and easy to adjust to your preferred shooting style too.

Price £279.99
Web www.photographyandcinema.com



C300S LED PANEL LIGHTS

An affordable and simple LED panel lighting solution for studio and location shooting



Studio lighting is the ideal way to light your subject as it gives you complete control over how your camera captures the scene. But, with all great things there is a price to pay. However, with easy availability of electronics from around the world, it's simple to hunt down a bargain for almost any purpose. C300S video lights provide you with a cheap lighting solution available throughout the world via eBay. They are panel lights, using 240 LED bulbs, available in single 5600K-colour temperature and featuring 3200K-5600K Bi-Colour adjustable temperatures.

Like most LED panel lights, the C300S can be powered in a number of ways. Specifically, these lights can use Sony NP batteries, an optional V-Mount battery or an external DC input. It also comes with a diffuser plate that will simply snap onto the front of the unit.

Producing a flicker-free light source, the C300S has a 65-degree beam angle and 1965lx light output, and with the available colour temperatures from tungsten to daylight, it can therefore be used for a range of subjects and shooting locations.

VERDICT

The C300S delivers a simple lighting solution for those wanting affordable LED panel illumination. They offer simple functionality with a basic dimmer switch on the rear of the unit, going from 25-100% brightness. It's also possible to boost the amount of light you're producing by linking multiple C300S units together, although at just over 1kg in weight per unit, this could become rather cumbersome.

Price Approx $200
Web Available through eBay



KONOVA K3B2-60 23” TRAVEL SLIDER

Add sliding shots to your next production with this quirky portable solution from Konova

The K3 slider series from Konova comes in a number of sizes, from 23-inches to 59-inches, allowing you to choose one that best suits your shooting style. However, the 23-inch option also delivers something many sliders simply don’t in the shape of portability. Constructed using high carbon bearing steel and an enhanced surface hardened by high frequency treatment, the K3 slider is a very strong unit, designed to take a weight of up to 50kg.

Konova promises extremely smooth motion with a reduced friction design, as well as the ability to adjust the overall resistance along the rail by simply tightening or loosening a single screw. Very practical. There are multiple mounting points along the slider to attach it to a tripod while the K3 also comes with fully adjustable legs. Using rubberised feet you can secure the slider on any surface and with each leg allowing for independent adjustment it allows you to ensure you’re shooting straight wherever you are.

VERDICT

Offering the standard 1/4” and 3/8” mounting threads, the K3 is compatible with all cameras and accessories and with the multiple tripod mounting points there are a number of ways in which the K3 can be utilised. Simply attaching a tripod at each end allows for a simple set-up, but it is also possible to arrange the K3 vertically, for up and down sliding shots, or even upside down for suspended shooting. The K3, therefore, is a very high-quality and useful slider, available in a range of lengths and designed to offer a versatile solution for a wide variety of sliding shots.

Price $319
Web www.konovafilm.com





WIELDY II STABILISER VEST

An innovative advanced stabilisation system designed for shooting on the go



With a variety of stabilising devices available for all types of different shooting, the Wieldy stabiliser vest is perhaps the most elaborate for those on-the-go shooting projects. Designed as a separate stabiliser and a mounting vest that you wear, it uses an advanced design to make the most of your body weight, while the attached dual-arm system reaches out to the camera stabiliser. This ensures that you can keep your motions steady while moving, as well as keeping a hand free to operate things like the follow focus.

The Wieldy II is an updated version of the original stabiliser vest. Constructed using carbon fibre, its arm now uses four springs and can take a weight of up to 9.5kg, which is more than enough for most simple set-ups. The stabiliser itself is fully adjustable, allowing you to adjust the length and counterweight depending on your preference. The dual-arm system and extendible stabiliser unit allows for extensive adjustment of the shooting angle, while the gimbal head delivers seamless movement while shooting.

VERDICT

Although it’s not the cheapest stabilising option available, and it can appear quite a daunting device to use, there’s no denying the stability you’ll get. A vest design allows you to permanently mount the camera to yourself, giving you the freedom to move about the scene with minimal effort. Meanwhile, the dual-arm design and multiple mounting options provide invaluable flexibility. A nice bit of kit.

Price $840
Web Available through eBay

SKYLAR MINIARM FOREARM BRACE

The MiniARM brace is a simple but effective bit of kit that performs a very basic task



The MiniARM is an extremely basic product, featuring a practical design that makes it easier to hold your camera stabiliser for longer periods of time. It's essentially a basic arm brace that straps tightly around your forearm, allowing you to spread the load of your camera set-up and stabiliser. This puts less strain on your hand and wrist and that makes it easier to hold your camera during prolongued shoots. In turn that should lead to more stable shooting when filming.

The MiniARM is made up of a padded forearm section with two large, adjustable straps that hold it firmly to your arm. Coming out around the wrist area is a small metal rod that can be inserted into the handle of your stabiliser to secure it in place. This helps to put the weight through the brace, spreading the load and thereby allowing you to use your entire arm to ensure you have a nice steady shot.



VERDICT

The MiniARM Forearm brace is a very simplistic product, designed to fulfil a basic brief for making your stabiliser easier to carry for longer periods of time. It's the ideal solution when something like a full-blown vest is inconvenient. However, the MiniARM is unlikely to be useful when coupled with a larger stabiliser and will be much more at home sitting on the end of a mini hand-held stabiliser. Nevertheless, it's pretty handy.

Price $60
Web Available through eBay

CAGEPRO GOPRO LPE6 BATTERY POWER CAGE

Power your GoPro camera for more than five hours with this nifty DSLR battery case

With GoPro cameras being such a popular tool for high-quality video, it's unsurprising that they have such a huge range of accessories to go with them. However, a major concern of those using the GoPro series is the lack of extensive battery life, a problem the company behind this product is now trying to solve.

The CagePro is a GoPro camera cage that also houses an LP-E6 battery. The camera and battery are held together in a robust construction, which offers additional mounting points for other accessories and various options to secure the cage itself. Typically used to power Canon DSLR cameras, the LP-E6 battery can power the GoPro for more than five hours on a single charge. With the ability to record up to four hours of HD video on a single 64GB memory card, the CagePro will allow you to get the most from your camera, making it ideal for lengthy recording times and also time-lapse set-ups.

VERDICT

Mounted in a stylish cage, the GoPro is attached to a USB cable, which draws power from the LP-E6 battery. When switched off it'll charge the internal battery within the camera. With the standard battery it's difficult to get much more than an hour of filming, especially when you enable Wi-Fi and put the LCD on the back. So, armed with the CagePro you'll be able to utilise the power of a GoPro camera without the need to cut your shooting time short.

Price TBC
Web www.photographyandcinema.com



HIFLY 3-AXIS BRUSHLESS GIMBAL CAMERA RIG

A motorised brushless gimbal design that works in tandem with a handheld camera rig

Until recently, brushless gimbals were mainly used in aerial video set-ups. However, with the ever-shrinking size of cameras, there has been a huge influx of small-time stabilisers that are now using this technology to offer videographers a new method of camera control. Available in a number of options, the HiFly is one of the latest designs to become available on the internet. Details and reviews of the product are currently very sparse, but initial feedback looks to be very positive.

This type of motorised brushless gimbal design offers seamless movement, without the need to touch your camera set-up. Typically seen on flying camera rigs, being a handheld unit offers a whole new world of shooting opportunities. And, with 3-axis control, it's easy to see why people are getting excited about the availability of such a product.

VERDICT

Still in their infancy, these products still have a long way to go before they'll be truly utilised by the masses. They still require you to set up the controller, while their manufacture and distribution is also yet to be anchored down to a single point. Still, once a major developer gets their hands on this type of innovation, it won't be long before much more viable versions of this 3-axis brushless gimbal set-up become available.

Price $1299.88
Web Available through eBay





APUTURE V-MIC VIDEO MICROPHONE

A simple shotgun-style hotshoe microphone

Sometimes, the simplest options can be the most effective, especially when it comes to recording your audio. That's what the Aputure V-Mic is trying to achieve. It's a small hotshoe mounted device, billed as a directional condenser shotgun microphone. It features a super-cardioid polar pattern plus line gradient acoustics and superior isolation to remove unwanted background noises, vibrations and low frequencies that can otherwise interrupt your audio. This helps to eliminate distracting sounds and get much more accurate sound from your subject.

Using a simple hotshoe mount means the V-Mic can be easily mounted on top of your camera. However, it also comes equipped with a 1/4" mount, which allows you to essentially attach it to any rig, cage or stand in order to position it in the best possible position to suit your shooting style. Also included is a simple wind shield and a wind screen, which will help to keep excess wind noise to a minimum. With a low-power indicator on the mic itself, this is a very basic and user-friendly addition to any kit.

VERDICT

A perfect solution for poor audio and well suited to those shooting with a small amount of kit. The Aputure V-Mic offers a cost-effective and simple addition to your gear list. It's compact enough to be suitable for those approaching their projects with a run-and-gun style, but is equally useful when mounted to a boom pole.

Price $119
Web www.aputure.com



TASCAM TH-02B CLOSED-BACK HEADPHONES

These impressive budget-priced headphones punch well above their weight

Perhaps an afterthought for some, monitoring headphones can be a real asset for ensuring that you get the best quality audio with your videos. They will enable you to precisely monitor the audio you're trying to capture while removing any unwanted distractions from your equipment, crew and the surrounding area.



The Tascam TH-02B's are closed-back headphones with a large padded headband, along with generous padding around the ear-cups for extra comfort during lengthy use. Each of the ear-cups will also rotate 90-degrees for one-ear monitoring and the whole set will fold up tightly for storage and transportation. A useful three metre cable length and snap-on 1/8" and 1/4" adapters mean you can use the TH-02s with almost any device. Meanwhile, the sensitivity of up to 98dB and a maximum power of 600mW makes them ideal for most of the scenarios you're likely to put them through.





VERDICT

The biggest selling point of the TH-02 headphones would appear to be their price tag. At the current RRP they're well worth the investment, if only for a spare or back-up set. However, most owners report high-quality sound with rich and punchy tones, which puts them on a par with headphones that cost many times as much. Therefore, these headphones the perfect choice for those monitoring their audio on a very low budget.

Price $30
Web www.tascam.com



RHINO RIG

A customisable and modular shoulder rig that can grow with you as you add to your kit list

This is another Kickstarter project that has really hit the ground running. The Rhino Rig is a fully customisable modular shoulder rig, made up of four main components and is hugely adaptable in order to meet your needs. The base kit, rail system, cage and rhino rest make up the full Rhino Rig set-up, and all can be adjusted to fit the operator and the kit you are using. The base kit consists of a simple butt-stock brace and a pair of fully articulating handgrips and from there you can build and customise the rig to suit your needs.

The Rhino Rig is getting a large amount of praise and interest, and it's easy to see why. By being made up of nine individually articulating thermoplastic rubber pads that evenly distribute the weight of your set-up across your shoulder, it is cleverly angled to perfectly form to the arch of your shoulder.

VERDICT

The Rhino Rig has taken the shoulder-mounted philosophy and ensured it can be adapted to suit almost any camera set-up and carrying style. Simply mount a camera with the base kit and you're away, but if you need to bolt on external monitors, microphones or a light panel, the Rhino Rig offers extensive options and a large number of mounting points.This, therefore, really is a stabiliser that can grow with you and your preferred shooting style.

Price TBC
Web www.rhinocameragear.com



ZACUTO MARAUDER

A foldable DSLR camera rig that makes an ideal solution for shooting on the move

The Marauder is one of two new additions to the Zacuto range of camera rigs. Aimed firmly at the DSLR run-and-gun style shooter, it offers a very unique design and innovative folding set-up. Unlike some of the other products in the same category as the Marauder, it doesn't require a lengthy and stress-inducing construction whenever you wish to use it. Due to a natty design, it will simply fold up for transportation and unfold again ready for use in what seems like a matter of a few seconds.

Included with the Marauder is a gunstock-style shoulder brace that features a comfy rubber pad and a large handgrip for controlling your set-up. The handgrip itself has a number of adjustable positions, locking into place with a simple red lever. Up on top of the Marauder is the included Gorilla Plate V2, which allows you to attach your camera with a single 1/4" screw and is designed to accommodate the Zacuto Z-Finder mounting frame. There's a quick release mechanism for removing your camera too.

VERDICT

A very practical design, the Marauder definitely stands out from the competition in this department. It delivers a very simple form of stabilisation, relying on your skill to control the camera while bracing it with the gunstock. However, the biggest selling point of the Marauder is the capacity for using a couple of quick release levers to collapse and unfold the rig to get you ready to shoot in a matter of seconds.

Price $775
Web www.zacuto.com



BENRO VIDEO MONOPOD A38TBS2

Stabilisation for those run-and-gun shooters who need a little extra support

Shooting on the move can be a testing task, and keeping your nice and camera stable as you move from location to location can be difficult. This is where monopods really prove to be useful assets, especially when they are geared firmly towards video filmmakers. Benro has therefore developed a whole new range of video monopods that cleverly use three folding legs at the base, to offer that little extra stability when you need it most. That means the new range will appeal to everyone, from those just getting started in the video world to those seasoned pros looking to refine their stabilisation arrangements. The top mounting plate is designed to fit almost every camera or accessory you'd wish to stick on it, with a maximum load capacity of 5.5lbs. That also adds to the overall appeal, making it an invaluable accessory for helping out on any kind of video project.



The monopod extends via four separate leg sections and goes from 66.5cm to 175cm, using twist locks to secure it in place. The folding feet also have secure grips on the base. This allows you to travel easily and call upon the monopod for almost any application.



VERDICT

Made of aluminium alloy, these new monopods from Benro are very high-quality and hugely robust. They come equipped with an S2 video head, which has an independent pan and lock arm, offering smooth and stable panning motion while you're using it. However, the key feature is the three push lock feet concept, which use a pan cartridge to allow for a slight slant in each direction, while keeping your kit steady.

Price $139
Web www.benrousa.com

RODE SM-3 SHOCK MOUNT

Improve your shotgun audio recordings with this slick and stylish hotshoe shock mount

Internal microphones on most cameras are fairly useless for all but the simplest of audio recording jobs. So, it's safe to assume anyone serious about their filmmaking will be using an external microphone. Unfortunately, these tend to come with a few problems of their own. Therefore, mounting a microphone on top of your camera or rig can be a simple and effective solution. However, even the most minute of movements can translate into vibrations that reach your microphone, in turn being recorded onto your soundtrack. This can be a minor issue for those with simple studio set-ups and a major one for those who prefer a run-and-gun method.

The Rode SM-3 shock mount is an ideal solution for all of these problems. Designed for shotgun-style microphones, it holds your mic independent of your set-up, between a four-way rubber suspension system. This shock mount can be tilted and moved to give your microphone more direction, as well as reducing the amount of unwanted vibrations hitting it.

VERDICT

Simple products are often the best and the SM-3 shock mount is no exception. It offers the perfect remedy for those using shotgun-style microphones, enabling you to simply connect it to your hotshoe or a boom pole using a 3/8" - 16 internal threading, with adjustments being easy via a large positioning screw. The SM-3 is a very effective and simple product that does exactly what its designed to and that's to secure very high-quality audio.

Price £39/$50
Web www.rodemic.com





SONY A3000

A brand new DSLR style camera with Sony's ever-popular NEX lens mount capability

The Sony A3000 takes a slightly different approach to offering a professional quality camera for the consumer market. The very smart-looking new Sony has a DSLR-style body that uses the same lens mount as that fitted to their NEX compact system camera line-up, all the while keeping



an extremely competitive price point. It's therefore top value if you're in the market for a new filmmaking device.

Inside the compact body you'll find a 20.1-megapixel APS-C sized sensor that uses a mirrorless design. It comes equipped with the sort of specification you'd expect to see in a beginner-level DSLR, such as 25 point contrast detect autofocus and ISO range of 100-16,000 (100-3200 for video) plus full HD video at a number of frame rates with built-in stereo microphones.

However, to retain that miserly price tag and these desirable specifications, corners have been cut. The LCD screen, for example, has just a 260k-dot resolution, which is very low when compared to the competition, and the electronic viewfinder requires the press of a button to bring it to life, which can be cumbersome in use.

VERDICT

Despite the drawbacks of the A3000, it offers an interchangeable lens mount, with a system that is tried and tested with excellent quality lenses. It also offers HD video recording with a choice of 50i or 25p shooting modes. It may not be able to compete with the likes of the entry-level DSLRs when it comes to handling, but at this price point, the competition sits more in the super zoom or advanced compact camera range, which makes the A3000 a much more appealing package overall.

Price £399
Web www.sony.co.uk

SONY NEX-5T

Sony's latest NEX mount compact system camera camera now adds NFC technology



To sit alongside their growing selection of compact system cameras, Sony has introduced the new NEX-5T. It follows the same design as the other NEX cameras, offering the popular NEX lens mount, a small and highly portable body, along with a huge range of features and functions. New for the 5T is the introduction of NFC (Near Field Communication), that allows for wireless transfer of data. Something that could be a great tool for sharing your videos on the move.

At the heart of the 5T is a mirrorless design with a 16.1-megapixel APS-C sized sensor. Around the back, you'll find a 3-inch tiltable LCD screen, which has a resolution of 921k-dots, making it ideal for viewing back your videos. The video modes available with the 5T are what you'd expect, with a selection of frame rates and an abundance of automatic modes to make it easy for anyone to get great results. There is also a powerful processor that will help with low-light recording, delivering ISO up to 25,600.

VERDICT

The NEX-5T is but a slight improvement over Sony's NEX-5R, with the introduction of NFC technology being the major upgrade. So if this is something that doesn't interest you, you're likely better off saving some money and opting for the older model. However, the 5T does deliver a tried and tested shooting capacity, with a popular lens mount and some fantastic features that will see it at home with both beginners and more advanced users.

Price £599/$699.99
Web www.sony.co.uk





TASCAM IXJ2 & IM2X RECORDERS

Turn your iPhone into a legitimate audio recording tool with the latest additions from the Tascam camp

Tascam is fast becoming a leader in audio equipment for videographers, offering a huge range of recording solutions and accessories. The latest additions from them really show that they're covering all bases, from kit for the pros all the way down to amateurs looking to get the best audio possible on a very small budget.

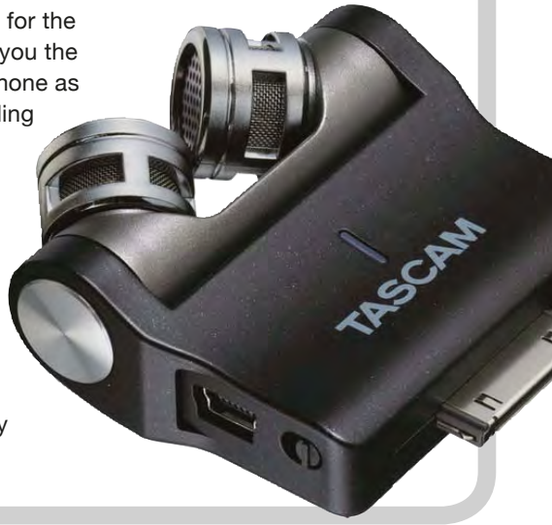
The IM2X and IXJ2 are iPhone-dedicated audio solutions, with the first offering an X/Y stereo microphone adapter that captures stereo recording directly into the iPhone, ready to use with a number of audio recording applications. The IXJ2 is simply an adapter that gives you the ability to plug any audio recorder directly into your iPhone. Essentially for the same purpose, it offers you the ability to call up your iPhone as a high-end audio recording device. Neat.

The IXJ2 records to two separate channels, both of which have independent input volume for advanced fine-tuning. There are also some very basic LED indicators, which make the IXJ2 extremely simple to use.

VERDICT

Both the IM2X and the IXJ2 are very simple but effective products that allow you to utilise your iPhone as a legitimate audio recording device. It would also appear that Tascam has thought of everything, because while both devices run off of the battery of your iPhone, they can also aid in charging your iPhone through a mini-USB port located at the side. Couple this with the free Linear PCM Recording app from Tascam and it's pretty hard to knock these devices. They certainly make a great option for recording audio.

Price £65
Web www.tascam.com



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WHAT'S HOT?

The team singles out current and forthcoming indie movies plus documentaries that are creating a buzz!

A Field in England

New from the director of Sightseers, A Field in England is a dark and psychedelic film, which follows a group of men trying to escape the ravages of civil war in England. They are soon found, ambushed and forced to search the field in which they are hiding.



Director Ben Wheatley
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 90 minutes
UK Certification 15

The Battery

A pair of ex-baseball players try to survive a zombie apocalypse by travelling across the American wilderness. Their relationship is tested when things get desperate. Not your average indie zombie flick, this is beautifully shot with witty dialogue.



Directors Jeremy Gardner
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 101 minutes
UK Certification TBC

As Cool As I Am

A coming-of-age story, which follows small town teenage girl Lucy. As she turns sixteen she dumps her tomboy image, tunes into her sexuality and duly clashes with her parents in the process. An adaptation from a novel of the same name.



Director Max Mayer
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 118 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Byzantium

Two lost women find refuge at a deserted old guesthouse where they meet two men. When Eleanor, the younger of the two, befriends one of their hosts, she tells them of their horrific secret; they are 200-years-old and survive on human blood.



Director Neil Jordan
UK Release May 2013
Language English
Duration 118 minutes
UK Certification 15

Downloaded

Downloaded is a documentary that explores the download revolution. We hear from the pioneers of the technology, the businesses and bands that have been affected and, of course, the consumers of an innovation that has changed the world.



Director Alex Winter
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 106 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Aftershock

A group of tourists find themselves trapped in a Chilean underground nightclub after a massive earthquake hits the city. Whilst fighting for their lives, the group discover they are not alone when crazed inmates escape from a nearby asylum. Stars Eli Roth.



Director Nicolás López
UK Release 2013
Language English/Spanish
Duration 89
UK Certification 18

Would You Rather

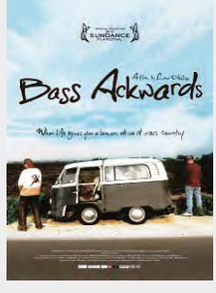
A woman needs to help her brother who has a life-threatening disease. Out of desperation, she unwittingly agrees to compete in a deadly game hosted by a sadistic millionaire in the hope that she will be granted treatment for her sick sibling.



Director David Guy Levy
UK Release May 2013
Language English
Duration 93 minutes
UK Certification 18

Bass Ackwards

After a disastrous affair with a married woman ends and his relationship with his roommate goes sour, Linas finds himself on the road. A comedic cross-country adventure in a modified VW van (known as 'Shorty') ensues in this dramatic comedy.



Director Linas Phillips
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 103 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Electrick Children

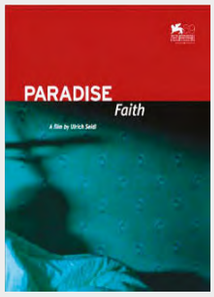
A modern-day tale of teenage pregnancy and an immaculate conception. A young girl believes she has become pregnant by powers beyond her control, while her deeply religious family believe her condition to be the result of an unforgivable act.



Director Rebecca Thomas
UK Release 2012
Language Spanish
Duration 96 minutes
UK Certification 15

Paradise: Faith

The second in a trilogy by Ulrich Seidl. Anna Maria, an abstinent middle-aged Austrian woman fights the ever increasing desire for sexual fulfilment, whilst also preaching her strong Christian beliefs to the estranged people in her village.



Director Ulrich Seidl
UK Release 2013
Language German, Arabic
Duration 115 minutes
UK Certification 18

Chasing Ice

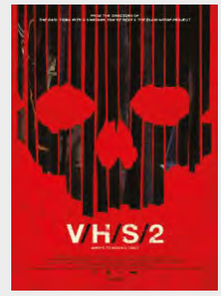
A documentary about National Geographic photographer James Balog as he travels the Arctic and sets up time-lapse cameras designed to capture the ever changing face of the glaciers, and to expose how their demise is really affecting our world.



Directors Jeff Orlowski
UK Release 2012
Language English
Duration 75 minutes
UK Certification PG

V/H/S 2

Following a very similar anthology format to the first V/H/S, a private investigator breaks into a house in search of a missing student. But, what he finds is a pile of old VHS tapes, each one hiding a tale of terror and a clue to the student's whereabouts.



Directors Various
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 96 minutes
UK Certification NA

Return

A weary soldier returns to her beloved all-American hometown after a four-year tour of duty, only to discover that readjusting to her old way of life and letting go of the one she left behind in the war zone isn't as easy as she expected.



Director Liza Johnson
UK Release 2012
Language English
Duration 97 minutes
UK Certification 15

Computer Chess

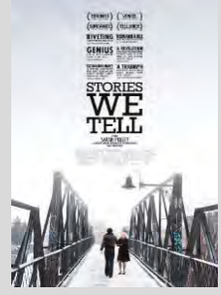
Set in the 1980s, back when the notion of a machine capable of artificial intelligence was a relatively new one. Over the course of a weekend this film follows software programmers in their task to create a machine capable of beating a human at chess.



Director Andrew Bujalski
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 92 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Stories We Tell

This film documents the filmmaker's family and the stories they have told over the years. Through a series of honest and sometimes quite uncomfortable interviews, the director and main subject of the film, tries to decipher lies and myth from reality.



Director Sarah Polley
UK Release 2012
Language English
Duration 108 minutes
UK Certification 12A

The History of Future Folk

Two aliens from the planet Hondo arrive on earth with the intention of ruling the planet, but their mission is abandoned when they discover the human invention of 'music'.



Director John Mitchell and Jeremy Kipp Walker
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 86 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Come Out and Play

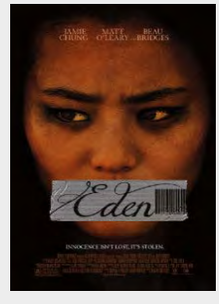
A couple who are expecting a child take a trip to an idyllic island - their last jaunt together before they become parents. However, it's not long before they realise that there are no other adults around. Their holiday soon becomes a living nightmare.



Director Makinov
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 105 minutes
UK Certification 18

Eden

Featured in DFM 6, Eden is the story of a young Korean-American girl who is captured and forced into the seedy world of human trafficking. In a desperate plea for her life, she joins forces with her tormentors in a powerful tale of survival.



Directors Megan Griffiths
UK Release July 2013
Language English
Duration 98 minutes
UK Certification 15

Black Rock

After spending years apart, three childhood friends put their differences aside and reunite for a long weekend away on a remote Island called Black Rock. There they invite some locals to join them and their idyllic weekend soon turns into a nightmare.



Director Katie Aselton
UK Release June 2013
Language English
Duration 83 minutes
UK Certification 15

A Band Called Death

Before punk became popular there was a band called Death, who emerged during the popularity of soul and disco. Record companies were intimidated by the new sound and they split before finishing one album. This is their story.



Directors Mark C. Covino and Jeff Howlett
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 96 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Robot & Frank

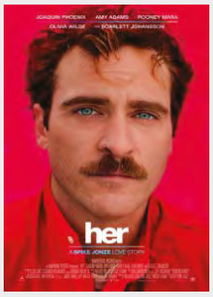
An aged ex-thief, now living with his wealthy son, receives an unexpected gift from him - a robot butler to help him around the house. However, the old man and his new sidekick are soon planning to pull off a rather daring jewellery heist together.



Director Jake Schreier
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 89 minutes
UK Certification 12A

Her

A lonely author slowly develops a strange relationship with his recently purchased female-voiced computer operating system (Scarlett Johansson), designed to fulfill his every need. Directed by Spike Jonze and due for a UK release in 2014.



Director Spike Jonze
UK Release 2014
Language English
Duration TBC
UK Certification TBC

Safety Not Guaranteed

Three journalists set out to find and interview a man who placed a personals ad looking for someone to time travel with. They eventually meet Kenneth, the man who believes he has built a time-machine.



Director Colin Trevorrow
UK Release 2012
Language English
Duration 86 minutes
UK Certification 15

The Hunt

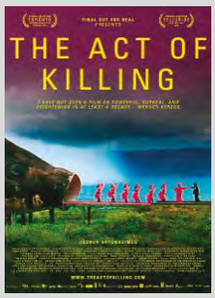
An unhappy teacher struggling with a custody dispute over his son sees his life improve as he eventually finds love and receives some good news. But his new found happiness is short-lived after an innocent little lie changes everything.



Director Thomas Vinterberg
UK Release 2013
Language Danish, English
Duration 115 minutes
UK Certification TBC

The Act of Killing

This powerful documentary tells a 50-year-old story of the mass-killings in Indonesia by a corrupt military group and hired gangsters. The filmmakers talk to the death squad leaders and challenge them to reenact the killings in cinematic styles.



Director Various
UK Release June 2013
Language English, Indonesian
Duration 115 minutes
UK Certification 15

The Cutoff Man

A modern tale set against the scorched landscapes of Israel. An ageing man has to live with the awkward and thankless task of cutting off families' water supplies when they fail to pay their bills in a financially broken community.



Director Idan Hubel
UK Release TBC
Language Hebrew
Duration 76 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Erebus

Two writers, while researching for a new book, visit Rhode Island's infamous Goram House, where they find out about its grizzly past. Three horrific tales of the past inside the property unfold in a welcome return to the horror anthology sub-genre.



Director Ricky Laprade
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration TBC
UK Certification TBC

Crystal Fairy

An eccentric twenty-something travels across Chile in search of a legendary hallucinogenic cactus. Along the way he befriends a radical hippy and invites her to join him. Then, on a beach at the edge of a desert, the true adventure begins.



Director Sebastián Silva
UK Release TBC
Language English, Spanish
Duration 98 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Ghosts With Shit Jobs

Set in 2040, following the collapse of the entire western world, people in China watch a reality TV show, which documents the poor western souls as they struggle to make ends meet with bizarre jobs, such as selling spider silk and attempting subtle product placement.



Directors Various
UK Release 2013
Language English
Duration 94 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Only God Forgives

A brutal film in which a respected drug dealer (Ryan Gosling), who is thriving in the back-streets of Bangkok, has his criminal life-style made even more complicated when his mother asks him to avenge his brother's violent murder.



Director Nicolas Winding Refn
UK Release August 2013
Language English
Duration 90 minutes
UK Certification 18

Head Games

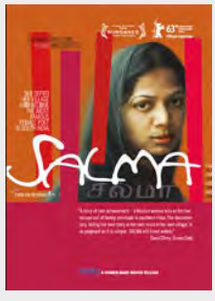
Head Games is a documentary that follows Chris Nowinski, an American football player and wrestler, as he tirelessly tries to uncover the truth about the permanent dangers and consequences of head injuries in all kinds of sporting activities.



Director Steve James
UK Release TBC
Language English
Duration 95 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Salma

At the age of 13, Salma, a young Indian girl, was isolated for 9 years by her parents until she agreed to an arranged marriage. Her passion was poetry, which she wrote against her husbands will, but despite her oppression, she became a respected poet and activist.



Director Kim Longinotto
UK Release 2013
Language Tamil
Duration 91 minutes
UK Certification TBC

Lore

This film begins at the end of World War II and Lore's father has just returned from a lost war. As American troops sweep across Germany and her parents prepare to move the family away, Lore begins to question her parents once respected political views.



Director Cate Shortland
UK Release 2013
Language English/German
Duration 109 minutes
UK Certification 15

BEST OF THE REST...

Releases by inspirational filmmakers that may have passed you by

The Station Agent

A train-loving man with dwarfism moves to New Jersey after the death of his only friend. He tries to maintain a life of detachment, but meets eccentric new friends along the way with their own personal issues.



Director	Thomas McCarthy
Year	2003
Language	English, Spanish
Duration	89 minutes
UK Certification	15

Treeless Mountain

A study in childhood resilience, set in Seoul, Korea, in which two sisters must look after one another when their mother leaves them with their intolerant, slave-driving aunt to go in search of their estranged father.



Director	So Yong Kim
Year	2008
Language	Korean
Duration	89 minutes
UK Certification	PG

Noroi: The Curse

This frightening tale follows a documentary maker in his journey across a Japanese town, searching for the truth behind an urban legend of a demon. An epic story that breaks the genre mould and which is genuinely scary.



Director	Kôji Shiraishi
Year	2005
Language	Japanese
Duration	115 minutes
UK Certification	NA

A Room for Romeo Brass

Two young friends, Romeo and Gavin, have their friendship tested when an exciting, but dangerous, stranger comes between them and ultimately threatens their families.



Director	Shane Meadows
Year	1999
Language	English
Duration	90 minutes
UK Certification	15

Garage

Set in rural Ireland, this is the tale of Josie, a middle-aged garage worker who is in search of intimacy and life fulfilment, but unknowingly gets himself into trouble with the law. A truly tragic film about isolation.



Director	Lenny Abrahamson
Year	2007
Language	English
Duration	85 minutes
UK Certification	18

Oldboy

A man is kidnapped and imprisoned in a small room for 15 years for no apparent reason. On his eventual release he seeks an explanation and revenge on his elusive captors, but finds out that they have new plans for him.



Director	Chan-wook Park
Year	2003
Language	Korean
Duration	120 minutes
UK Certification	18

Risen

This is the fascinating story of Welsh featherweight boxer Howard Winstone and his rise to fame. After winning the world championship and securing his place in the history books, Winstone is a legend.



Director	Neil Jones
UK Released	2010
Language	English
Duration	121 minutes
UK Certification	15

Cashback

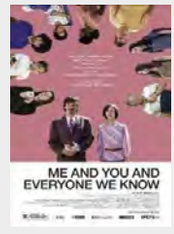
After ending a long-term relationship, a young man develops chronic insomnia, so he takes a job in a 24-hour supermarket to pass the hours. There he meets a range of mysterious and colourful fellow night-owls.



Director	Sean Ellis
Year	2006
Language	English
Duration	90 minutes
UK Certification	15

Me and You and Everyone We Know

A very poetic comedy and a look at how two people; an eccentric artist and a shoe salesman, struggle to connect emotionally in a contemporary world.



Director	Miranda July
Year	2005
Language	English
Duration	91 minutes
UK Certification	15

Dogtooth

Three children are confined to an old country house by their control-obsessed parents well into adulthood. There, they listen to recordings of the outside world and develop a whole new language for themselves.



Director	Yorgos Lanthimos
Year	2009
Language	Greek
Duration	96 minutes
UK Certification	18

Clerks

Really needing no introduction to the average indie film fan, Kevin Smith's comedy about two convenience store workers and their friends stands the test of time. If you haven't done it yet, it's a must-see.



Director	Kevin Smith
Year	1994
Language	English
Duration	92 minutes
UK Certification	18

Adam & Paul

This comedy follows two vulnerable drug addicts during one day, as they wander the streets of Dublin looking for their next score. In the grip of drug addiction, the friends are oddly optimistic about life and the future.



Director	Lenny Abrahamson
Year	2004
Language	English
Duration	83 minutes
UK Certification	15

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